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JOHN NICOLAS COLDSTREAM
The Formation of the Greek Polis:
Aristotle and Archaeology



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John Nicolas Coldstream, London

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When an archaeologist of pre-Classical Greece is invited by your distinguished Academy to speak on an historical subject, the result will be an attempt at proto-history: that is, an attempt to gain an historical insight into a period without contemporary written records by confronting its archaeological evidence with the memories preserved in later literary sources. To my mind, protohistory is a useful word, already accepted in several European languages, though hardly at all in English. To be sure, its aims may still be regarded with deep suspicion in two different quarters. Thus among the ancient historians of the English-speaking world we hear very much more of your word *Quellenkritik*; the written sources, when based on oral tradition from a much more remote antiquity, are sometimes subjected to such a ferocious internal criticism, that virtually nothing then remains to be compared with the archaeological record. Meanwhile the prehistoric archaeologist, with no written sources at all to guide or mislead him, may sometimes regard as unscientific any form of enquiry which crosses the frontier between two different disciplines. But I hope it can be assumed that you do not share such an extreme distrust of protohistory; otherwise you would not have invited an archaeologist to present a paper on an historical theme.

Before the period of which I shall speak, the ancient Greeks had already been settled in the Aegean area for well over a millennium. The Mycenaean civilisation, with its autocratically governed palace states, had flourished and then collapsed. Then followed a Dark Age of poverty, isolation, and illiteracy, out of which emerged the civilisation of the *polis*, or city state, familiar to us from classical Greek authors. We are dealing, then, with the genesis of the Greek *polis*, in so far as we can understand it from a combination of literary and archaeological evidence.

The Aristotelian Scheme

To confront the archaeological record, let Aristotle be our chief witness. From his *Politics* we learn that a *polis* must be a completely self-sufficient and autonomous state consisting of a single central settlement and its surrounding countryside. Its affairs, both internal and external, must be in the hands of some form of constitutional government carried out in the central town, but involving complete

unity of town and country. How, then, had the *polis* come into being? In earlier times Aristotle implies that the Greek had lived only in villages, or *komai*. Their society had been loosely organized by tribes or *ethne* under the rule of kings, just as an individual family is ruled by its head. But, just as each village had once been formed through a union of individual households, even so, in the fulness of time, the *polis* arose from a partnership of villages uniting for their own common good and thereby achieving complete self-sufficiency.¹

Before considering the archaeological evidence, let us begin with some elementary *Quellenkritik*. How could Aristotle, living in the fourth century B.C., be so sure about a political change which must have occurred several centuries earlier? The answer must be that this change was still incomplete in his own time. In many parts of Greece the *polis* had not yet taken root. The Boeotians, for example, had accepted life in towns, but preferred to run their affairs as a loosely united league of towns, none of them completely independent of its neighbours. For Aristotle they would recall the old villages before they had coalesced into a truly self-sufficient and autonomous *polis*. And in some backward regions, especially in the northwest of Greece, the inhabitants still lived in villages and were organized by *ethne*. With such examples before his eyes, Aristotle could reconstruct the antecedents of the *polis* in the more progressive parts of the Greek world; just as today a social anthropologist, showing far greater boldness than Aristotle, may study the ways of primitive societies still existing in Africa and the Pacific islands, in the hope of throwing some light thereby on an early stage of an ancient civilisation.

It has been generally assumed among ancient historians that Aristotle's reasoning did not extend back as far as the sophisticated palace bureaucracies of the Mycenaean age, of which he can have had no knowledge. If so, his primitive tribal society was that of the Greek Dark Age, and the first moves towards the *polis* should be one of several symptoms of the great recovery which followed in the later eighth century B.C.; to the same period belong the rise of the great Panhellenic sanctuaries at Olympia and Delphi, the full recovery of communications with the older civilisations of the Near East, the first exodus of Greek colonists to Italy and Sicily, and the invention of the Greek alphabet after several centuries of

¹ Arist. Pol. 1252b. See G. L. HUXLEY, 'Aristotle on the origin of the polis' in Stele Kontoleonos, Athens 1979, pp. 258 ff. (Much thought was devoted in the discussion to the precise distinction between a polis and a kome. Prof. H. von Petrikovits drew attention to a parallel problem of definition which exists for the historian of the early Middle Ages. Prof. E. Coenen remarked that a true polis should possess a constitution and a place of assembly. It is in this sense, i.e. the Aristotelian sense, that I also understand the term, in contrast to its more general application in the Homeric poems (cf. LUCE, art. cit. infra n. 7). When Aristotle attributed the formation of the polis to a union of komai, his role as a political theorist was stressed (Prof. R. Kassel); but he was also a careful observer of historical fact (Prof. W. Kluxen). As Prof. N. Himmelmann pointed out, he had before him the example of Sparta, which even in the time of Thucydides (i. 10.2) had not yet achieved a complete coalescence of komai.)

illiteracy; and perhaps also the composition of the Homeric poems: in brief, a very creative age indeed. But the first systematic attempt to apply archaeological evidence to this matter is only very recent, and one understands why this should be so. The quest for the emergent *polis* can hardly be pursued through the exploration of a single site, however large and important; still less, through a single excavation. What is needed is a vast store of evidence amassed over many years of archaeological research, to give us a balanced picture of progress throughout the entire Greek world during the period in question. Only in this way can we hope to detect the attributes of the *polis* as defined by Aristotle, and when they first occur in each region: the complete autonomy and self-sufficiency, the unity of town and country, the cohesion of villages into a central settlement, and the first signs of corporate effort for the common good.

Temples and Population

An important advance along this line of enquiry was made by A. M. SNODGRASS in two recent publications.² As one of the surest symptoms of the emergent *polis* he singled out the building of an urban temple dedicated to a local patron deity; he has also drawn attention to a steep rise in the population of Attica and the Argolid, following after severe depopulation during the Dark Age; and both these developments are shown to coincide during the later eighth century. The population figures are based on the number of excavated graves, dated by pottery to successive generations – a method which leads to the astonishing conclusion that by about 720 B.C. the people of Attica had become seven times as numerous as they had been sixty years earlier.³ Some caution is needed here. Births do not necessarily balance deaths; indeed, the total of Athenian graves in the early seventh century shows a considerable decline from the high figures of the late eighth. On quite different grounds, a good case has been made by the Field Director of the American Excavations in the Athenian Agora for a general drought towards the end of the eighth century, accompanied by famine and pestilence.⁴

For Athens, then, it would be better to base our figures on the needs of the living. One of their most urgent needs is for water. Within the fully excavated part of

² A. M. SNODGRASS, *Archaeology and the rise of the Greek state*, Cambridge 1977; *id.*, *Archaic Greece, the age of experiment*, London 1980. Hereinafter SNODGRASS 1977 and 1980 respectively.

³ SNODGRASS 1980, p. 23 figs. 3–4.

⁴ J. McK. CAMP, 'A drought in the late eighth century B.C.', *Hesperia* 48, 1979, pp. 397ff; see p. 400 on the sharp decline from the late eighth to the early seventh centuries in the number of recorded Attic graves.

Athens which lies in and near the later Agora, a count of wells⁵ dug and used in successive phases of the Geometric period suggests only a threefold increase of population in that area during the course of the eighth century – a rather more credible figure. For Attica as a whole, however, we must take account also of many small sites in the countryside, where the earliest evidence of post-Mycenaean occupation is not earlier than the second half of the eighth century.⁶ Now Aristotle does not tell us that the *polis* came into being because of a sharp rise in population; but if even the most cautious figures for Athens are typical of eighth-century Greece as a whole, then it is easy to see how a cluster of villages would eventually coalesce into a single large settlement. And, faced with such a rapid growth, the inhabitants would soon need to evolve some kind of constitutional government, in order to manage their affairs and live at peace with one another.

Indeed, no early *polis* could survive unless its citizens felt a strong sense of belonging together.⁷ In this respect SNODGRASS is surely correct in underlining the importance of a common religious cult in a central area. For him “the building of a monumental temple to a patron deity . . . may be our clearest indication that the emergent *polis* has arrived, or is at hand”.⁸ The addition of the last phrase is prudent, since in several places – Athens, Corinth and Eretria, for example – we shall see that the central temple was built well before the coalescence of the villages. Nevertheless a broad historical argument can be sustained when we remember the political changes which had occurred since Mycenaean times – the change from Mycenaean monarchy to the constitutional government of the emergent *polis*. The corporate effort which had been devoted to the construction of palaces for the kings was now directed to the service of the patron deity, the supreme protector of the *polis*. Where an acropolis had once been the seat of a Mycenaean monarch, by the eighth century it had been set aside for the worship of the gods. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the small *polis* of Tiryns,⁹ where the eighth-century temple of Hera is actually built upon the ruins of the Mycenaean palace, even reusing some of its foundations. Indeed the temple, the house of the deity, should at least be worthy of a king; and so, with the greater resources which a major *polis*

⁵ J. N. COLDSTREAM, *Greek Geometric Pottery*, London 1968, 360 n. 1; CAMP, art. cit., p. 400f. n. 12.

⁶ COLDSTREAM, loc. cit.; *id.*, *Geometric Greece*, London 1977, pp. 133 ff. fig. 43; SNODGRASS 1977, pp. 16 ff. fig. 3.

⁷ See J. V. LUCE, ‘The polis in Homer and Hesiod’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 78, 1978, pp. 1 ff.

⁸ SNODGRASS 1977, p. 24; cf. SNODGRASS 1980, pp. 33 f. (Prof. K. H. Rengstorff remarked on a parallel from a later age: the Jewish Synagoge, an essential feature of a polis as seen by St Luke.)

⁹ K. MÜLLER, *Tiryns III*, 1930, pp. 213 ff.; H. DRERUP, *Griechische Baukunst in geometrischer Zeit*, *Archaeologica Homerica Band II, Kapitel O*, pp. 17 f. (Dr. C. Podzuweit described how recent excavations in the *Unterburg* of Tiryns have reinforced the case for continuity from Mycenaean times, at least in cult practices.)

could command, the form of an ordinary house could be enlarged for the gods to the unprecedented length of a hundred Greek feet. The island of Euboea, progressive in so many other respects, led the way in such grandiose experiments. The Eretrians, in the earliest known urban sanctuary laid out by about 750 B.C., built for Apollo a vast enlargement of the current apsidal house-plan.¹⁰ Earlier still, though well outside the town, is another such *Hekatompedon* which the Samians built for Hera around 800 B.C.:¹¹ a similar enlargement of an aristocratic *megaron* hall. When this temple needed repair later in the eighth century, it was protected by a peristyle of wooden columns, thought once to be the earliest anywhere in Greece; but now we must take account of an astonishing new discovery made two years ago, which undermines many orthodox opinions. At the Euboean site of Lefkandi, which some hold to have been the original home of those who first settled in Eretria around 800 B.C.,¹² traces of an apsidal building have been found on the edge of the outlying Toumba cemetery: a building well over a hundred feet long, surrounded by a primitive peristyle.¹³ Its construction, and its collapse, are securely dated by pottery deposits to within the first half of the tenth century B.C., one of the darkest parts of the Dark Age. Since the excavation is not yet complete, its function remains obscure. Provisionally it has been called a *heroön* rather than a temple, because under the floor lie the princely burials of a man and a woman, together with their chariot team of four horses in an adjacent pit. But whatever its purpose may have been, this building must have required a massive labour force; one begins to suspect that the depopulation during the Dark Age may have been somewhat exaggerated – at least in Euboea.¹⁴ And, returning to the precociously early temples of Samos and Eretria, we may remark that a very long period can elapse between the building of such temples and the true consolidation of a *polis*. It is always difficult to make general statements about this question, since different Greeks made progress at various rates in diverse ways.

Regional Differences

But this diversity is only to be expected, given the complete autonomy and self-sufficiency of the emergent *polis*. It is also reflected in the unprecedented degree of local variation in the most abundant class of artifacts in the second half of the eighth

¹⁰ K. SCHEFOLD, *AntK* 14, 1974, pp. 56f.; 17, 1977, pp. 60f.

¹¹ E. BUSCHOR, *AM* 58 (1933) pp. 150ff.; DRERUP, *op. cit.* (n. 9 supra) pp. 13f.

¹² K. SCHEFOLD, *Führer durch Eretria*, Bern 1972, pp. 18–21. For other views see P. G. THEMELIS, *AE* 1969, pp. 157ff.; M. R. POPHAM, *Lefkandi I*, London 1980, pp. 423ff.

¹³ POPHAM et al., 'The hero of Lefkandi', *Antiquity* 56, 1982, pp. 169ff., fig. 2.

¹⁴ For Lefkandi, e.g., SNODGRASS 1980, pp. 18f.; cf. A. R. BURN, *JHS* 102, 1982, p. 264.

century, the Late Geometric painted pottery. Here we must face a remarkable paradox. As we have seen, this was the time of recovery from the Dark Age, when prosperity was returning, and when communications within the Aegean were better than at any other time since the Mycenaean collapse. In the days of Mycenaean prosperity, good communications had had exactly the opposite effect; those were the days of the Mycenaean *koine*, when a single style of pottery could flourish throughout most of the Aegean area. With the fall of the Mycenaean palaces this uniformity was broken; free communications were declining in a world full of conflict and destruction, so that each region was left to its own devices, and evolved its own local style. Of these the most important was developed in Attica, a region which had suffered comparatively little from the commotions accompanying the downfall of Mycenaean civilisation. In the later part of the Dark Age, when communications slowly began to improve, the pendulum swung back again towards a *koine* under the influence of the Attic style, first in the Late Protogeometric of the tenth century, and secondly – after a slight interval – in the Middle Geometric of the late ninth and early eighth. And then, in the later part of the eighth century, we witness a sudden movement away from uniformity, towards the emergence of at least twelve regional schools of pottery. In earlier times, a single ceramic style may spread through trade and good communications; but now, in spite of even better communications, there is a greater diversity than had ever been seen before. Clearly, some powerful new centrifugal force was at work. Now we cannot safely argue from pots to politics, or claim that the regional styles by themselves prove that the *polis* has arrived. But how else can we explain this unprecedented combination of reviving prosperity and extreme diversity, except by assuming a growing pride in local tradition which would be quite consistent with the birth of the *polis*?

Once again we must beware of generalisations, since some of these local schools arose in areas where even in Classical times the true *polis* had never taken root, and the inhabitants were still organized by *ethne*.¹⁵ Nevertheless, this geographical distinction between *polis* and *ethnos* does find some reflection in the archaeological record, in the character of the various Late Geometric pottery styles (as I have tried to demonstrate in another article¹⁶). Characteristic of the *ethnos* lands are the most derivative styles, owing more to outside influences than to local invention, and

¹⁵ SNODGRASS 1980, pp. 42 ff. fig. 9; J. BAECHLER, 'Les origines de la démocratie grecque', Arch. europ. sociol. 21, 1980, pp. 226 ff.

¹⁶ COLDSTREAM, 'The meaning of the regional styles in the eighth centuries B.C.', in R. HÄGG and N. MARINATOS (edd.), The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century B.C.: Tradition and Innovation. Proceedings of the Second International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 1981: Stockholm 1983, pp. 17 ff. (Prof. R. Merkelbach commented on the analogy of the epichoric alphabets, clearly distinct from one another, and yet locally consistent.)

showing very little uniformity among themselves; these styles are to be found in Thessaly, and on the western seaboard from Acarnania down to Messenia. But wherever the *polis* took root, there we find the more original and creative styles, autonomous in the sense that they owe little or nothing to their neighbours. Outstanding in this respect are the Attic, Corinthian and Argive styles, the most autonomous of all, and the most influential elsewhere; they are also the most uniform, giving us the impression that each one is created in a single urban centre, and radiates outwards over the surrounding countryside with little or no local variation as far as the regional frontier. Thus, by distinguishing the character of the various local styles of the late eighth century, we can catch sight of the two most important Aristotelian attributes of the *polis*: complete unity of town and country, and complete self-sufficiency and autonomy which encourages free invention and autonomy of style.

The Greek Mainland

But now we must pass on from the various attributes of the *polis* and visit the actual sites. Let us see how far the archaeological record agrees with Aristotle's statement that the *polis* was formed from a partnership of villages. If we begin with the major *poleis* of the Greek mainland, the evidence will seem at first sight to be disappointingly slender. Athens, Corinth and Argos, having attained the status of *poleis*, were to have a long and glorious future. But during the period in question, all buildings were extremely unpretentious. House walls were built of mud brick, upon a base of rough stone. Even with the most careful excavation, what chance of survival would these flimsy constructions have, under the huge overlay of Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic and Roman foundations which must have cut into them – foundations of monumental stone blocks laid in wide and deep trenches which must have obliterated much of the earlier record? Furthermore, the ancient sites of Athens and Argos lie within modern cities, so that much of their extent is still inaccessible to archaeological exploration, even though rescue excavations are gradually filling out the picture.

But there is also a third problem, on which archaeology can hardly offer any enlightenment at all. As soon as a *polis* comes into being, there will be a need for a central meeting place, an *agora*, for the management of public affairs. By much later times an *agora* had become an architectural form, a square surrounded by fine public buildings; but the word means no more than a place of assembly, and in its earliest form an *agora* need leave no architectural traces¹⁷ at all for the archaeologist

¹⁷ Thus the Spartans, in the Great Rhetra (Plut. Lycurgus vi. 2), receive instructions from the Delphic oracle to convene their assembly (*apellazein*) in the space between the bridge Babyke and the river

to find. In the Athenian *agora*, for example, the earliest public buildings of which we know are no older than the age of Solon around 600 B.C.; that is also the time when the private occupation of the area, represented by house remains and wells, came to an end.¹⁸ But in later literary sources there are memories of an older *agora* up on the saddle between the Acropolis and the Areopagus hill.¹⁹ There we should not expect to find any early structural remains, and in fact no remains have been found. Nevertheless it would be hard to envisage a more suitable site for the original Athenian *agora*, between the main urban sanctuary on the Acropolis for the patron deity, and the hill on whose slopes some of the leading aristocrats were buried during the Geometric period, and upon which they may well have lived.

Indeed, with so little evidence of the living to guide us, the burials are our chief source of archaeological evidence for the major sites of the mainland during the Early Iron Age. They supply us with a negative image, as it were, of the settlement pattern at any given time. The area of Athens which was later enclosed within the Classical city wall is full of burial grounds dating to the Geometric period,²⁰ a pattern consistent a cluster of detached villages. Some are no more than family plots, and one plot within the site of the later Agora is adjacent to the remains of a slightly later house.²¹ The larger cemeteries, no doubt, would likewise have served villages near by. Thus our only clue to the eventual coalescence of these putative villages lies in the gradual withdrawal of burials from the centre. Within the Agora site there were no more burials after 700 B.C.;²² but since the wells, with their deposits of domestic pottery, continue until about 600,²³ we must assume that the area was occupied by private houses for another century before it became the centre of public affairs.

Knakion: H. T. WADE-GERY, *Essays in Greek History*, Oxford 1958, p. 42 n. 1; G. L. HUXLEY, *Early Sparta*, London 1962, pp. 44, 121 n. 287.

¹⁸ E. BRANN, *The Athenian Agora VIII*, Princeton 1962, pp. 107ff.

¹⁹ Apollodorus, FGH 244 F 113. Cf. R. E. WYCHERLEY, *The Athenian Agora III*, pp. 224f., no. 731; *id.*, *Phoenix* 20, 1966, pp. 285ff.; H. THOMPSON, *The Athenian Agora XIV*, p. 79; J. TRAVLOS, *Pictorial Dictionary of ancient Athens*, London 1971, pp. 1–2. (Prof. G. Lehmann mentioned the sources for an early prytaneion, apparently near the Aglauros sanctuary on the north slope of the Acropolis: Hdt. i. 146, viii. 53; Paus. i. 18. 3–4. But L. P. HOLLAND, *AJA* 43, 1939, pp. 289ff., has marshalled the arguments for locating this building actually on the Acropolis rather than in an older Agora; cf. E. VANDERPOOL, *Hesperia* 4, 1935, p. 470 n. 3. Attention was also drawn to two institutions which link the Athenians with their kinsmen in the Ionic cities across the Aegean: the festival of the Anthesteria (Prof. G. Lehmann), and the Ionic calendars, closely resembling that of Athens (Prof. R. Merkelbach). If these links go back to a time before the Ionian Migration (but this is far from certain), they might suggest that even at the beginning of the Dark age the Athenians had already evolved some central control of their religious practices and daily life.)

²⁰ COLDSTREAM, *Geometric Greece*, London 1977, pp. 135ff. fig. 44; cf. SNODGRASS 1977, pp. 26ff. figs. 4, 5; SNODGRASS 1980, pp. 29ff. fig. 5.

²¹ R. S. YOUNG, *Hesperia Supplement* 2, 1940; BRANN, *Agora VIII*, p. 110 fig. 9.

²² BRANN, *op. cit.* pp. 111ff. pl. 45.

²³ BRANN, *op. cit.* p. 108.

In a recent study by Dr. R. HÄGG a similar pattern has been observed at Argos.²⁴ There, as in Athens, the Geometric burials are widely scattered all over the ancient site, covering an area over two kilometres in diameter. In addition, more traces of early habitation have been found than in Athens, and their distribution confirms the assumption that the family burial plots served detached villages or hamlets near by. But already in the early eighth century it seems that an urban nucleus was beginning to form at the southern edge of the site, at the foot of the Larissa hill and near the later Agora. By the early seventh century, burials in that area were becoming very rare; the settlement expanded over ground previously occupied by graves. When the Agora was first laid out, we do not yet know.

Excavations at Corinth tell much the same story. There, too, the distribution of Early Iron Age burials suggests a cluster of villages,²⁵ each one burying its dead in the immediate vicinity, sometimes within the inhabited area. The chief village lay in the central part of the site, later occupied by the Roman Forum, and just below the small hill on which the Archaic temple of Apollo still stands. Recent research has shown that this temple had a predecessor constructed around 700 B.C., the first to be built of monumental stone blocks, carefully dressed.²⁶ This was also the time when the central village was expanding into an urban centre, and received no more burials; but, according to the director of the current American excavations, the final stage of urbanisation was not reached until the late seventh century when the first city walls were constructed.²⁷ The Archaic Agora has yet to be found.

Evboea

Thus far, then, the archaeological record is consistent with Aristotle's village theory. But when Athens, Argos and Corinth developed from villages into *poleis* they already had a long past, and the force of tradition might well have retarded their development. What of the settlements newly founded in the eighth century, with no Dark Age antecedents? Such a place is Eretria, which lacks any substantial trace of occupation before 800 B.C.²⁸ If any sure information can be extracted from

²⁴ R. HÄGG, 'Zur Stadtwerdung des dorischen Argos', in *Palast und Hütte: Tagungsbeiträge Symp. der A. von Humboldt-Stiftung Bonn-Bad Godesberg 1979*, Mainz 1982, pp. 297ff.; cf. *id.* *Die Gräber der Argolis I*, Uppsala 1974, pp. 18ff.

²⁵ C. ROEBUCK, *Hesperia* 41, 1972, pp. 96ff.; C. K. WILLIAMS and J. E. FISHER, *Hesperia* 42, 1973, pp. 2ff., fig. 1.

²⁶ H. S. ROBINSON, *Hesperia* 45, 1976, pp. 203ff.

²⁷ WILLIAMS, 'Corinth in the Protocorinthian period' in *Grecia, Italia e Sicilia nell' VIII e VII sec. A.C.: Convegno internaz. . . . dalla Scuola Arch. Italiana di Atene 1979*, forthcoming.

²⁸ P. G. THEMELIS examines the slight traces of occupation in the Bronze Age (*AE* 1969, pp. 147ff.) and draws attention to sporadic finds of the earlier Iron Age (*PAE* 1976, p. 76 pl. 39a); but no Early Iron Age structures have been found to antedate the first buildings in the sanctuary of Apollo around 800 B.C. (n. 10 supra).

a much-discussed reference in Strabo, its settlers came from an Old Eretria as yet unidentified, but possibly to be equated with the site of Lefkandi ten kilometres to the west. From its earliest days Eretria covered a wide area, extending from the harbour to a rocky acropolis one and a half kilometres inland – considerably larger than the modern town which has not proved a serious obstacle to archaeological research. From results so far obtained, the eighth-century occupation seems to be concentrated in three patches widely separated from one another: a harbour settlement, with its cemetery to the west; farther inland, an aristocratic burial plot near the later west gate, rich in iron weapons, jewellery, and bronze cauldrons; and an eastern group, at the foot of the acropolis. It seems, then, that Eretria was at first settled in villages, and an ingenious attempt has been made to assign each village to one of the three original Eretrian tribes.²⁹ In one respect, however, Eretria acted like a *polis* from the start: for its oldest buildings are those of the earliest known urban sanctuary, founded in the exact centre of the settlement in honour of the patron deity, Apollo Daphnephoros. Another early corporate achievement was the construction of a fortification wall around 700, not only to defend Eretria against attack, but also to keep out a torrent which had been diverted from the settlement.

The Western Colonies

Hardly a generation later than her own foundation, Eretria became one of the mother-cities of the first Greek colony in the west, at Pithekoussai on the island of Ischia.³⁰ Having arrived in a strange land, did the first colonists remain apart from one another in separate villages, as in their homeland? Or did they prefer to make common cause in a more compact settlement? We cannot be certain, since most of Pithekoussai lies under the modern resort of Lacco Ameno. One area, however, has been fully excavated, on a ridge on the outskirts of the ancient site; here a group of eighth-century buildings came to light, devoted to the working of bronze, iron, and lead.³¹ There the blacksmiths would have had easy access to their fuel and a

²⁹ N. M. KONTOLEON, *AE* 1963 (1965), pp. 13 ff.; THEMELIS, *AE* 1969, pp. 161 ff. (Prof. G. Lehmann inquired whether Lefkandi may not have preceded Eretria as a unified polis and as a centre of early Euboean hegemony. Although excavations at Lefkandi have not yet progressed far enough to reveal the overall pattern of habitation, it seems that the known cemeteries there (eleventh to ninth centuries) served a nearby settlement, 'Area SL', destroyed in c. 825 B.C., and not the main site on the Xeropolis hill: see POPHAM and SACKETT, *Lefkandi I*, 1980, pp. 362 ff. Lefkandi, then, would also appear to have been settled in villages, at least during the use of the known cemeteries.)

³⁰ On the date of the foundation see most recently D. RIDGWAY, 'The foundation of Pithekoussai' in *Nouvelle contribution à l'étude de la société et de la colonisation eubéennes*, Centre J. Bérard, Naples 1981, pp. 45 ff.

³¹ J. KLEIN, 'A Greek metalworking quarter', *Expedition* 14.2, 1972, pp. 34 ff.

breeze to fan their furnaces, without any danger of setting fire to the central parts of the settlement. This concentration of specialist craftsmen surely served more than a mere village; on the contrary, its siting implies a decision by the whole colony, for the common good. Another corporate decision must have been to confine all burials to a single cemetery, in the San Montano valley outside the settlement; already over fifteen hundred graves of the eighth and seventh centuries have been found here, but they are said to represent less than ten per cent of the whole burial ground, which appears to be entirely un plundered.³²

Complementary evidence comes from several other western colonies where our Italian colleagues have discovered many traces of early 'urbanism'. At Syracuse, for example, the first Corinthian colonists at once chose the island of Ortygia to be the heart of their new town, well-watered by the spring of Arethusa, and commanding the finest harbour in Sicily. At the very centre of Ortygia, offerings at the altar of Athena go back to the first years of the colony;³³ and the latest reports mention square houses near by, and a network of streets, already in existence before 700 B.C.³⁴ And, as at Pithekoussai, even the earliest burials were confined to a main cemetery, sited well beyond the limits of the settlement.³⁵

If the earliest western colonies appear to forestall their mother-cities in behaving like fully-fledged *poleis*, their precocity need not surprise us. Their sites and territories, which include some of the best harbours and the most fertile land in Italy and Sicily, could hardly have been won without initial conflict with the natives. Once established, each colony was no doubt compelled to order its affairs as a tightly-knit community, taking thought for its defence without any prospect of help from its mother-city, and arranging for its subsistence either by fruitful commerce (as at Pithekoussai) or by distributing arable land among its citizens.³⁶ Thus the colonies would have acted like autonomous and self-sufficient *poleis* from their very beginnings. Whether their experience accelerated developments in the homeland is a matter open to question; in fact, among the mother-cities of the

³² G. BUCHNER, Expedition 8.4, 1966, pp. 5 ff.; *id.*, Arch. Reports 1971, pp. 63 ff.; BUCHNER and RIDGWAY, Pithekoussai I, forthcoming.

³³ P. ORSI, MA 25, 1919, pp. 427 ff.; n.b. p. 539 fig. 140. For more recent excavations in the same area see P. PELAGATTI, Dial. Arch. 3, 1969, 141 ff.; *ead.*, 'Elementi dell' abitato di Ortigia nell'VIII e nel VII sec. a.C.' in G. RIZZA (ed.), Insediamenti coloniali greci in Sicilia nell'VIII e VII sec. a.C., Catania 1978, pp. 127 ff.

³⁴ Summarised by R. J. A. WILSON, Arch. Reports, 1982, p. 87.

³⁵ NSc 1895, pp. 109 ff.; for the earliest graves see G. VALLET and F. VILLARD, BCH 76, 1952, pp. 329 ff. figs. 1-6; p. 331 fig. 7. On the topography of early Syracuse see T. J. DUNBABIN, The Western Greeks, Oxford 1948, pp. 48 ff.

³⁶ Just as, in Odyssey vi. 7-10, Nausithoos brings the Phaeacians to their new home in Scheria, and divides the arable land (aroura) among the first settlers.

Achaean and Locrian colonies in the extreme south of Italy, the idea of the autonomous *polis* never took root even in Classical times.³⁷

Old Smyrna

But does it follow that a Greek colony, by its very nature, will at once behave like a *polis*? Let us return to the Aegean to consider a much earlier colonial movement at the beginning of the Dark Age, which brought Aeolian and Ionian refugees from the Greek mainland to found new settlements on the western seaboard of Asia Minor. Of these sites the most fully explored is Old Smyrna; not fully enough, perhaps, for us to know whether the earliest houses were grouped in separate villages and, if so, when the intervening spaces were first filled by an expanding population. We can, however, watch the progress of the settlement from the sparse habitation of the ninth century, through the crowded and chaotic jumble of detached cottages in the eighth, to the more orderly layout of rectilinear houses in the seventh century not long before the destruction of the town by king Alyattes of Lydia.³⁸ The urban temple, first constructed around or shortly before 700, is taken by SNODGRASS to be the first sign here of a true *polis*. Smyrna, however, has its own symptom of precocity. Far earlier than in any settlement of the Greek mainland, its fortifications were first erected in the middle of the ninth century, and enlarged a century later.³⁹ Self-defence in an alien land was no doubt an urgent consideration, as later in the western colonies. But the massive scale of the circuit, and its monumental foundations, are in striking contrast to the simplicity and squalor of the contemporary houses. Here was a town which already took pride in its outward appearance, a town whose citizens were content to work strenuously for the common good. Progress towards a true *polis* may have been as slow as in mainland Greece; but the first sign of such progress at Smyrna must surely be the huge corporate effort involved in building the first town wall.

Zagora on Andros

Perhaps a similar claim can be made for an equally early fortification at Zagora, on the Cycladic island of Andros. It defends the only easy approach to a settlement on a steep and windy promontory, occupied only from about 850 to 700 B.C. The reasons for its foundation and abandonment are equally obscure; nevertheless the

³⁷ SNODGRASS 1977, p. 33.

³⁸ J. M. COOK, BSA 53–54, 1958–59, pp. 10ff.; site plan, pl. 74 (R. V. NICHOLLS).

³⁹ R. V. NICHOLLS, BSA 53–54, 1958–59, pp. 35ff., especially pp. 120ff.; reconstruction, p. 51 fig. 7. Cf. DRERUP, *op. cit.* (n. 9 supra), pp. 44ff.

discovery of an exclusively Geometric town is extremely helpful for our enquiry.⁴⁰ Does Zagora in any way foreshadow the true *polis*? The landward approach was fortified from the start;⁴¹ the original wall was strengthened many times, ending up with a thickness of seven metres. How was the labour mustered, if not by some form of political organization, or at least a sense of common interest? In the settlement, however, there were many open spaces; the stone-built houses were grouped in clusters,⁴² each perhaps housing a *genos* or clan. The most extensive cluster was laid out on the highest ground at the centre of the promontory, in spacious rectangular units and beginning with an original nucleus;⁴³ each house was tacked on to its neighbour in a haphazard way, but with a surprisingly orderly alignment; and yet very little thought was given to streets. The largest house,⁴⁴ with five rooms arranged round a courtyard, probably belonged to the local chief; from his open-fronted main hall, eight metres square, he could look out across his courtyard, over an open space towards the town's sanctuary. There we must think away the temple of Athena Polias,⁴⁵ not built before the sixth century long after the desertion of the houses; but the altar is older, and evidently served an open-air cult during the life of the Geometric town. The open space recalls the memory of the earliest Athenian *agora* already mentioned, sited between the main sanctuary and the quarters of the leading aristocrats; was this, too, a primitive *agora*, where the local chief presided over an assembly of citizens?⁴⁶

⁴⁰ A. CAMBITOGLU, PAE 1971, pp. 257ff. fig. 2; *id.*, PAE 1974, pp. 164ff., figs. 1, 2, pls. 114–25; plans by J. J. COULTON. (Prof. H. Lauter suggested that the failure of the local water source might explain the desertion of Zagora, and also of other Cycladic settlements deserted at approximately the same time: Ayios Andreas on Siphnos, the islet of Donousa, and – one might add – Koukounaries on Paros. The abandonment of these sites might well be linked with the evidence of drought in Athens: see CAMP, art. cit., n. 4 *supra*, p. 407.)

⁴¹ For the earliest pottery associated with the fortification see CAMBITOGLU, Archaeological Museum of Andros, guide to . . . Zagora, Athens 1981, pp. 103ff. figs. 60, 61.

⁴² PAE 1971, p. 271, fig. 10 (reconstruction by J. J. COULTON).

⁴³ For the sequence of building see CAMBITOGLU and COULTON, Zagora I, Sydney 1971, pp. 33ff.; for the most recent plan (COULTON), *op. cit.* (n. 41 *supra*) fig. 4.

⁴⁴ Zagora I, pp. 30ff., rooms H 19 (megaron), H 21 (court), H 22–23, H 28–29. (Prof. N. Himmelmann asked whether room H 19 might have served as a primitive bouleuterion rather than as the residence of the local chief. The finds, however, included spindle whorls, coarse pithoi, and cooking pottery (*op. cit.* pp. 31, 47), suggesting a purely domestic use.)

⁴⁵ See most recently CAMBITOGLU, *op. cit.* (n. 41 *supra*) pp. 83f. figs. 11, 14.

⁴⁶ On a smaller scale cf. the open space between the eighth- and seventh-century acropolis of Emporio on Chios, between the chief aristocrat's megaron and the open-air sanctuary of Athena: J. BOARDMAN, Greek Emporio, BSA Suppl. 6, 1966, pp. 249ff., plan opp. p. 4; DRERUP, *op. cit.* (n. 9 *supra*), pp. 10f., 47ff.; COLDSTREAM, Geometric Greece, London 1977, pp. 308, 314f.

Crete

If Zagora illustrates an interesting halfway stage in the evolution of a *polis*, the record of Crete tells quite a different story. How would Aristotle have viewed a place like Karphi,⁴⁷ the early Dark Age settlement of Minoan and Mycenaean refugees high up in the Dictaeon mountains? No villages here; instead, a strong nucleus with over a hundred stone-built rooms, as large as the main cluster at Zagora, but three centuries earlier; winding lanes lead to a central cobbled square, and there is an open-air sanctuary at the outer edge. Small peripheral clusters of *megaron* houses give the impression of a relatively luxurious suburb rather than a separate village. There are no fortifications; in this terrain they would have been superfluous. The burials are in the valley below, in collective family tombs⁴⁸ according to the Bronze Age custom.

One might think that Karphi, as a stronghold of refugees, was unusually conservative for its time, recalling in miniature the centralised cities of Minoan Crete. But was the pattern any different at Knossos, then already under the control of Dorian newcomers? Unlike the one-period sites of Karphi and Zagora, Knossos was continuously occupied from Neolithic until Late Roman times, and thus cannot be expected to yield any substantial traces of Early Iron Age architecture. Nevertheless, after more than eighty years of excavations and a thorough survey of the whole area,⁴⁹ scattered domestic deposits will reveal the shape and size of the settlement at any given time. At Knossos, during the eleventh century B.C., during the life of Karphi, the only known traces of settlement form a tight nucleus to the west of the palace site, within what had been the central area of the Minoan city. Nearby is the Spring Chamber,⁵⁰ a sanctuary of a Minoan vegetation goddess. The nearest burials, again in collective family tombs, are one kilometre to the northwest, in what was to become the main cemetery;⁵¹ others are even more distant, some in reused Minoan tombs.⁵² The next four centuries saw a steady growth but no change in the general pattern. By the late eighth century B.C. there are many

⁴⁷ J. D. S. PENDLEBURY et al., BSA 38, 1937–38, pp. 57ff.; V. R. D'A. DESBOROUGH, *The Greek Dark Ages*, London 1972, pp. 120ff.; DRERUP, op. cit. (n. 9 supra), pp. 38ff.

⁴⁸ BSA 38, 1937–38, pp. 100ff.

⁴⁹ S. HOOD and D. SMYTH, *Archaeological Survey of the Knossos area*, 2nd edition, BSA Suppl. 14, London 1981: hereafter KS².

⁵⁰ KS², p. 12; pp. 55f. no. 285; A. J. EVANS, *The Palace of Minos II*, pp. 103ff. Subminoan domestic deposits have been found at KS² nos. 185–6, 188, 192, 197, 206–08, 210, 214–16; for no. 216 see BSA 67, 1972, p. 76 no. 32.

⁵¹ H. W. CATLING, *Arch. Reports* 1979, pp. 44ff., figs. 2, 5–11.

⁵² KS² nos. 6, 19, 49, 52, 55, 331. Reused Minoan tombs occur at nos. 19 and 331, and perhaps also at no. 6: cf. BOARDMAN, BSA 55, 1960, pp. 142ff.

more plots of outlying tombs,⁵³ but no trace of any outlying villages to go with them. Conversely, central Knossos has yielded no sure evidence of any burials.⁵⁴ Instead, the settlement and the main cemetery have expanded to meet each other, the peripheral wells of the settlement already encroaching on the outer edge of the cemetery near the modern Venizeleion hospital.⁵⁵

Unfortunately we know nothing as yet about the ancient Greek *agora*⁵⁶ at Knossos, which would throw some light on the final consolidation of the Dorian *polis*. For complementary evidence of this kind we must therefore look eastwards to the Eteocretan site of Dreros, in the hills overlooking the gulf of Mirabello. There, in a saddle between two slopes, lie the remains of a late eighth-century temple dedicated to Apollo Delphinios, with cult statues in hammered bronze.⁵⁷ On the same alignment, and possibly part of the same building programme, is a rectangular area framed by stone steps on three sides for the convenience of an assembly.⁵⁸ If their chronological association with the temple is sound, this will be the earliest known *agora* built as an architectural feature, as part of an urban plan. One purpose of the *agora* would be for public display of the laws – and it so happens that Dreros has also yielded the earliest known Greek law⁵⁹ inscribed on stone, of the late seventh century. In the older world of Hesiod's *Erga* the law is still unwritten, and still in the minds of the often corrupt aristocrats, or *basilees*.⁶⁰ To display the laws in public, engraved on stone, must have been a most important innovation of a truly constitutional government. But in this *polis* of Eteocretans there are also shades of a distant Minoan past: the memory of the theatral steps, as seen in the Minoan palaces; and the awareness of Minos the lawgiver, long ago.

⁵³ KS² nos. 16, 39, 46–7, 51–6, 62, 107, 151, 251, 320, 323, 367. Outside the area of the Knossos survey, tombs of this period have been found (a) west of Ayios Ioannis: Alexiou, *Kret. Chron.* 4, 1950, pp. 296 ff.; (b) at Atsalenio: C. DAVARAS, *BSA* 63, 1968, pp. 133 ff.; (c) at Mastamba: A. LEMBESI, *PAE* 1970, pp. 270 ff.

⁵⁴ At the northern edge of the Minoan palace EVANS found an 'oven-shaped' structure, KS² no. 223, which he assumed to have been a Geometric tomb; near the western edge of the settlement, at KS² no. 182, a chance find of twelve ninth-century vessels may be from a nearby tomb, but no tomb was actually found in subsequent excavations.

⁵⁵ KS² nos. 88, 134, 179, 201, 211, 214, 222. The evolution of the Knossian polis is more fully examined in COLDSTREAM, 'Dorian Knossos and Aristotle's villages', *Mélanges H. VAN EFFENTERRE*, *Rev. Arch.* forthcoming.

⁵⁶ Possibly in the region of the Roman Basilica, KS² no. 112.

⁵⁷ S. MARINATOS, *BCH* 60, 1936, pp. 219 ff.; I. BEYER, *Die Tempel von Dreros und Prinias A*, Freiburg 1976, 13 ff.

⁵⁸ P. DEMARGNE and H. VAN EFFENTERRE, *BCH* 61, 1937, 10 ff.

⁵⁹ L. H. JEFFERY, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece*, Oxford 1961, pp. 310 f. pl. 59, 1a. (Other public inscriptions, at least as early as the Dreros code, received comment. Prof. K. W. Welwei mentioned the inscription on the cenotaph of the proxenos Menekrates of Kerkyra, set up by the damos. A long constitutional inscription on stone has recently come to light at Tiryns: *AE* 1975, pp. 162 ff.)

⁶⁰ Hesiod, *Erga* 263 f.

Indeed, everything we know about Crete in these centuries points to a much greater continuity with the Bronze Age past than we find anywhere else in the Greek world; a continuity made possible by a less serious disruption of life following the passing of Minoan civilisation. Especially relevant here are the refusal to abandon the idea of a central settlement, however straitened the circumstances might be; the rigid adherence to the old Minoan tradition of extramural burials; and the persistence of collective tombs, in which successive generations of the same families were laid to rest. These are three among many other symptoms of a relatively settled society surviving through the Dark Age with a faith in the future, an ingrained respect for law and order, and an inherent stability which had not been greatly disturbed even by the arrival of a Dorian ruling caste. On the contrary Aristotle himself, who displays a deep interest in Cretan institutions, describes how Dorians from Sparta founded their Cretan colony at Lyttos: “when the colonists settled, they found the inhabitants at that time living under a constitution which they adopted and still retain. And to this day the dwellers in the countryside use these laws unchanged, believing Minos to have framed them in the first place.”⁶¹ So, if the Cretans prove to be an exception to his general rule that a *polis* is formed from villages, Aristotle would not have been in the least surprised; for he, if anyone, understood the wide differences of character between the cities of the Greek world.⁶²

⁶¹ Arist. Pol. 1271b; cf. HUXLEY, ‘Crete in Aristotle’s Politics’, GRBS 12, 1971, pp. 505 ff.

⁶² I am grateful to Professor G. L. HUXLEY for his helpful suggestions after reading this paper in manuscript. My sincere thanks are also due to my German colleagues for their constructive comments in the discussion.

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