



PROLOGUE

The Greek world of antiquity extended in time and space far beyond what we today call 'Greece'. Many modern tourists who are surprised to find the ruins of Greek cities in Turkey might be even more surprised to know that many Greek cities of equal antiquity are still thriving today with names such as Naples ('Nea polis' or 'New City') in Italy and Marseille (Massalia) in France. It is even more remarkable that Ai-Khanoum in northern Afghanistan (Alexandria on the Oxus) was founded by the Greek ruler Seleucus I in around 275 BC, and is one of dozens of formerly Greek cities scattered around central Asia.

At its peak, Greek civilization extended for over a thousand kilometres east and west from the Greek mainland. Syria, Egypt and Babylonia were once Hellenistic kingdoms. Furthermore, many of those famous Greeks of whom students learn in high school seldom if ever spent time in Greece itself. These include Herodotus, Sappho, Euclid, Pythagoras and Archimedes.

There are many books covering the history of Classical Greece, though that era represents only a minor portion of the overall history of the Greeks of antiquity. Much of the rest has been forgotten, or is mentioned only when the Greeks of other times and places came into contact with different cultures. This book takes the opposite approach. The Greek mainland is seldom mentioned and the focus is on the Greeks elsewhere in the ancient world, especially in what today we would call the Middle East and Central Asia, places that many ancient Greeks simply called 'home'.



Greek theatres showed the same plays and had the same architectural features, whether they were intimate venues in Spain (top) or seated thousands, as did this theatre at Delphi in Greece (bottom).

This book is the story of the Greeks outside Greece. It covers a period of over 2,000 years, from prehistoric Greek settlements on the shores of the Black Sea to the fall of the last great Greek city of the medieval world – mighty Constantinople. Between these two points we see the rise of Greek power in the Aegean Sea, the



Shallow drinking cup featuring Dionysiac revels, of a type typical in early Classical Athens.

conquests of Alexander and the sprawling Hellenistic successor kingdoms that ruled an area as large as the later Roman empire. This book will go on to argue that Greek culture in Asia Minor and the Middle East was largely unchanged by the Roman conquest, and reverted almost entirely to its Greek roots as the long-lived Byzantine empire thereafter.

It is worth noting that all the Seven Wonders of the ancient world – the Great Pyramid at Giza, the Lighthouse at Alexandria, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Colossus of Rhodes, the Temple of Artemis, the Statue of Zeus at Olympia and the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus – were either built by Greeks or in lands later ruled by Greeks. Yet only one – the Statue of Zeus – was actually in mainland Greece itself.

The world of greater Greece was an astonishing place that combined huge intellectual energy, a remarkable humanism and a wonderful sense of aesthetics. With a cast of characters ranging from decadent despots and eccentric geniuses to artists of sublime ability, the people of the extended Greek world have had a huge effect on the development of Western civilization. This book will show that, unbeknownst to us, their presence is still everywhere around us today.

This is their story.



Greek and later Hellenistic sculpture combined aesthetics and realism in a manner unsurpassed even today.



ONE

THE GREEKS BEFORE ALEXANDER

In 1200 BC ancient Greece was part of a developing and integrated civilization that stretched from India to the western Mediterranean. This was the peak of the Bronze Age, when trade routes reached from Britain deep into Asia, and an Egyptian pharaoh might be entombed along with vases from Mesopotamia, olive oil from Cypress, cedar from the Lebanon and bronze artefacts made with tin from Welsh mines. This was the age of the Hittites, the bull-leaping Minoans of Crete and the palace civilization of Mycenaean Greece, a world later remembered in the legends of Hercules and Helen of Troy. It was advanced, sophisticated, prosperous – and doomed.

When disaster struck, the magnitude was as vast as the cause is incomprehensible. In the fifty years between 1050 and 1000 BC almost every city of note in the ancient world was sacked and destroyed. Even mighty Egypt, protected by her natural barriers of sea and desert, came under major assault by the *Hyskos*, the Sea People, and under that attack the state almost collapsed into anarchy. Lacking the natural defences of Egypt, the Hittite and Minoan civilizations were wiped out. Trade collapsed, populations went into catastrophic decline and civilization in the western Mediterranean fell into a 'Dark Age' that lasted for over 250 years.

What caused the collapse has been the cause of much academic debate in the modern era. Volcanic eruptions have been suggested, especially the vast explosion of the volcano at Thera (modern Santorini), and the climate changes brought about by such eruptions. Thera threw an estimated 60 cubic kilometres of debris into