ARCHAIC PERIOD OF GREECE

Students Name

Course

Professor’s Name

Date

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The beginning of Greek history is believed to have originated from the Archaic or the old period between 800-500BC. The period was also known as the "dark age" or the "old age" .It lasted until the discovery of the Mycenaean civilization[[1]](#footnote-1). The word Greek Dark Sage has created controversies for scholars and historians to define its meaning with respect to the events during the period. As a result, scholars have uncovered that Greek had a low population during these ages, engaged in activities such as iron-making for economic stability, lack of art and literacy, and lawlessness. The period depicts the different aspects of western civilization, including power structure, social and spiritual values, institutions versus individual relationships, and revolution and historical transition. However, to understand the complete image of the archaic period, it is essential to analyze the period with respect to the Dark Ages of Greece.

As recited in the Iliad and the Odyssey poems, it was a time when Greece was ruled under the aristocratic government[[2]](#footnote-2). Kings had limited powers with tarnished theft, farmers, and pirates' reputations. Everyone during the era had equal power to their people, and no one could elevate themselves to be great than the others. The Greece population would barely read or write, and their loyalty was to themselves and the family and not their country. Additionally, under population was another concept that facilitated the naming of the dark ages simply because there was a limited food supply. The Greece people were also confined to their territories with no contact to the outside worlds like Mesopotamia and Egypt. Thus, this research analyses, power structure, social values, historical transition, imperialism, economic activities and culture of the Greece population during the archaic period.

*Research Questions*

1. Why was the archaic period of Greece also known as the Greek Dark Age?
2. How did different aspects of western civilization impact the culture, political and social lives of the Greece population?

**Historical Transition of Greece**

In order to understand the reason why the archaic period is termed the Dark Ages, it is essential to refer to the political, cultural, and social events that happened during the period. The Dark Age Greece is regarded as a historical transition between Mycenaean Greece fall and the Iron Age Archaic Greece. The primary rationale why the era is entitled the Dark Age is because of the collapse of the government that reigned the Mycenaean age, causing the collapse of the Greece civilization[[3]](#footnote-3). The collapse of these political governances caused disruptions to the massive architecture, economic and political stability writing, and fine arts of mainland Greece, which facilitated Athens's survival. As historians have defined the age, it was an experience of the invasion and local rebellions leading to a fatal disruption of Greece's economic sustainability. The wars severely affected the sustenance levels destroyed, cities, fortresses, palaces, and towns impacting the settlements and activities done by the Greece community for economic stability[[4]](#footnote-4). Most of the human-led changes were facilitated by the surging populace of Greece and its growing trade, which ushered in annexation and the introduction of a novel era of intellectual philosophies.

Amongst the most affected regions were the sectors that were hardest hit. To begin with, foreign trade was dramatically seized. Despite their love for seafaring trading, the Mycenaeans became restricted to home-grown productions and trade[[5]](#footnote-5). As a result, farming declined to sustenance levels, and trade relationships with the neighbors lessened[[6]](#footnote-6). However, this diversion to local trade and subsistence agriculture reduced the sources of nutrition daily life materials and reduced the foreign ideas and cultural influences. As a result, Greece became an isolated trading culture from its neighbors, declining the population of Greece close to extinction. However, the most important change that was experienced was the sustenance of Athens.

**Political Structure**

The political structure was one of the sectors that experienced a dramatic change during the archaic period. Aristocracy was Greece's primary governance, which ruled in the best rule. The rule of authority was segmented between the leaders and followers. Greece embraced a Homeric society where authority was uniform, meaning that no region or location was in the social, organizational structure was higher than the other[[7]](#footnote-7). The Homeric basalis was regarded more as just big men rather than king, thus perceived as people of great achievement rather than inherited status[[8]](#footnote-8). During the aristocracy governance, the Homeric basalis joined groups in large communities, distinguished themselves from the low social class, and established institutions for power-sharing. The farmers outside the aristocracy attained control over the land and gained some wealth. This gave them the financial power to purchase armors, and hence they would help defend the polis during the wars. The war existed because Greece needed to protect their limited land from invasion by the polis, who had a large phalanx of more than 200 men and eight rows deep[[9]](#footnote-9). Since Greece's population was low and the aristocracy government had limited men to create the army, most soldiers volunteered from the new farmer class.

Notably, as the war continued and more farmers were enrolled in the army, they demanded an equitable share in the government. As the aristocracy maintained their reluctance to share the power with the new class farmers, they led to the tyrants and Tyranny. The tyrants were a group of powerful individuals from the aristocratic government who agreed to bring change to the rising class of farmers[[10]](#footnote-10). They knew the tyrants could seize power since the farmers were more than the aristocracy. Despite these moves being illegal, some Greek tyrants promoted positive change, such as improving the economic status of the polis and promoting arts.

On the other hand, some used the powers at the expense of their benefits. Unexpectedly the Greece tyrants lasted for a short period and were then overthrown, channeling the new farmer's class power in the government. The system allowed more citizens to participate in the government and politics but was still considered lower than the citizens who lived a low social life. The political system changed from the "rule for the better" to the "rule for the few" based on the social-economic status and not hereditary.

**Social Values**

The problem of aristocracy that emerged during the dark ages affected the political structure and caused a change in social values. It causes a historical transition to classical Greece. The population of Greece developed new moral and political concepts channeling the emergence of the sustained intermingling and assimilation of foreign cultures[[11]](#footnote-11). The change began with the expansion of Greek settlements on the western coast of Anatolia in a region called Ionian. Most of the Greek population envied long-distance trading during the Iron Age until during the dark ages when the cultural contacts and foreign-made goods began to flow back to Greece.

Most importantly, the Ionian Greeks became more influenced by the Phoenician's art and writings vanishing the Greek writing system. The new system seemed nuanced, flexible, and easier to assimilate. This solidifies Plato's speech that the Greeks never invented anything but improved on borrowed concepts[[12]](#footnote-12). The Ancient Greeks' writing system, such as the cuneiform and hieroglyphics, had many characters to memorize, making it difficult for the Greek people to read and write through this system. The Greeks discovered that the Phoenician's writing system was easier to learn and used it to improve the literacy levels of ancient Greek[[13]](#footnote-13). The assimilation of the writing system advanced not only to the tax recording but also into their literature, drama, and poetry. For example, the Iliad and the Odyssey poem were composed and written down during this era following a long excitement for centuries[[14]](#footnote-14)[[15]](#footnote-15). Throughout this era, the Greece people were grappling and struggling to overcome personal limitations and the limitations inflicted by the nature, opportunity, and the will of the beliefs.

The Homeric poems present the values of the Greeks during the archaic age, which was to determine what was better and appropriate for human behavior. The Greeks desired that a man dominated beyond the other males following the arms strength and intelligence of words. This meant that men had the mandatory obligation to defeat the enemy and allure the potential allies to join this political arena. Most of the Greece culture and values were primarily based on excellence but not personal virtue or else good intents. The primary concern was on how a man could better perform in the public competition or publicly perform in a debate of the emerging city-state of Archaic Greece.

Most importantly, the Greeks feared the shame and, more so, the consequences of the defeat. In this case, Greece established Olympic games in Elis and was open to all Greek communities. The Greeks believed they could achieve more through opportunity and believed fame through physical achievement, speech and beauty was immorality[[16]](#footnote-16). The ideas of the competition enormously impacted the development of the Greeks culture, a culture that was anticipated to extend to the whole Mediterranean region.

Admittedly, the change in Greek values impacted Greek culture and political law and order. The Archaic age represents a period when Greek underwent major political modernizations such as creating the polis, which served as a political unit centered on a city. The Greek poleis from both the old and the successive classical era, legal citizenship, voting on laws, and impartiality determined the patriotism of individuals[[17]](#footnote-17) [[18]](#footnote-18). In most Western civilization sources, Greek has shared similar institutions. Any Greece citizen was eligible to join only a single polis and played a critical role in decision making. As aforementioned, the rich inherited the most powerful positions, and aristocracy became a hereditary political phenomenon. The other free citizens who had no say in the political decisions were mandated to elect their representative or approve laws created by the aristocrat's officials. A point of concern is that even in the poleis, where the citizens had less power to vote for the laws directly, there existed a strong sense of community, thus fulfilling the concept of civic virtue. The set of laws for the Greeks differed from the other civilizations in that every individual was equal before the law and did not necessarily base their civic virtues on class identity or origin. The idea of civic virtue transitioned to modern patriotism and proofs to be the most significant moral standard of the roman republic and empire.

Additionally, the culture of Greece during the Archaic period exerted more importance on gender. The culture was participial, with most men holding the top political positions. Women were expected to serve their husbands and be sexually monogamous dutifully. This culture was contrary to the kind of freedom men had over sexual matters. Men could freely liaison with enslaved women and other men of their social category[[19]](#footnote-19). In this case, women were limited to social influence and economic powers and could not inherit any form of economic or social approval. They generally separated from men in social discourses and were invaluable to the Greek economy. However, they did not contribute to economic activities such as farming and trading.

**Culture and Trade**

During this age, the Greek poleis had distinct identities and independence. As aforementioned, they engaged in small disputes fights against one another but treated every person of equal culture[[20]](#footnote-20). All the Greeks shared a mutual intelligence dialect of the Greek language and adored the pantheon of gods. They communally had a political tradition of citizenship and participated in different cultural practices from storytelling, listening, traveling, reciting poems, and symposia. The poleis also had created institutions that unified the communities through the Panhellenic games[[21]](#footnote-21)[[22]](#footnote-22). The game included a combination of sports and religious festivals. Each aristocrat city was required to complete a series of sporting activities. The Olympic Games of 776BCE is regarded as a definitive borderline of the Dark Age and the archaic ages of the Greek civilization[[23]](#footnote-23). These Olympics were unique due to their longevity and attracted diverse Greek settlements. This was one of the activities that facilitated a seize of wars as athletes were allowed to travel safely for participation, respecting the chief of Greek gods called Zeus.

Notably, at the end of the Old Ages, the populace levels of Greece increased, leading to the expatriation of the poor to the gravelly soils of Greece. The Greek territories extended across the Mediterranean from Spain in the west to the black sea in the north. In their settlements, the Greeks elected trading posts as growing olives and grapes continued to on the mainland. Most of the Greece settlers took merits of the bountiful lands a distance from Greece for farming other crops. As more and more Greeks settled in different places, the cultures of the Greek colonist advanced and assimilated new practices. Sometimes the Greek colonists intermarried foreigners because most expeditions encompassed young men. Although the Greek colonist discovered that the isolated areas were good for trading activities, they also acknowledged that maintaining close connections with the polis promoted a strong economic outpost[[24]](#footnote-24). Following the end of the Dark Age, traders recovered, and dense commercial shipping was established across the Mediterranean. During this period, the colonies played a crucial role as they played roles close to the ancient poleis. Therefore, better conclusions are that the Greek civilization was not united by the government of common leadership structure but by the culture. The culture influenced the Greek culture and diverse cultures from the vast strip of the Mediterranean expanse and the Middle East region.

**Democracy and Athens**

As much as the history of Greece civilization is discussed, the change in Athens is one of the special types of historical transition. Athens is one of the most notable poleis of the Archaic Age. The Athens were always happy with their Mycenaean heritage and was the only city-state that survived during the fall of Mycenaean and the Dorian invasion[[25]](#footnote-25)[[26]](#footnote-26)[[27]](#footnote-27). After the fall, most of Athens became economically insecure as they could not settle their debts. Others even became slaves to compensate for their debts. Even as the tyrants rose in power, the challenges persisted, and the harsh laws catalyzed the solemnity of the problems. The most affected group was Athens, as they were hit the hardest to appoint that they were ready for change. The first change was introduced by solon, emphasizing the laws to eliminate the harsh rules by the tyrants[[28]](#footnote-28). Second, another Athenian named Cleisthenes brought about a new government to introduce democracy[[29]](#footnote-29). This form of governance gave the right to voice to every Athenian citizen regardless of their socioeconomic status. However, the rule also limited the liberty of women to participate in the government, defending that they lived private lives. Criminal, enslaved people and foreigners were also excluded. The citizens who were elected to serve the jury were determined by the voice of their citizens and not by luck.

In conclusion, the Archaic period served a momentous period when Greek developed unique political, social, economic establishments and culture as part of their Mediterranean ecosphere. The diversity of the dark ages Greece attributed to the diversity of Archaic Greece and its culture that shaped their identity. On the contrary to what most historians framed their thesis, the succession of the archaic period was no way an argument of the poleis and its politics but rather involved several collective events. It was a transition of Greece from its initial remote and geographically poor nature to a great empire. The transition success was unified by the cultural and regional diversity of the Greece people rather than the political governance. Therefore, it is better to rethink the revolutions and historical transition concept instead of discussing Greek history from the polis lens. Change is the key event that occurs to all western civilization aspects present in Greece during the archaic period ranging from the cultural, political, and economic structure. Therefore, historians must acknowledge the Dark Age as a distinct period that shaped Greeks history.

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