



The beginnings of the Polis

The 8th Century BCE

- ▶ The 8th century was a period of great importance in Greek history.
- ▶ It marks the beginnings of Greek civilisation as we know it.
- ▶ The 8th century was a time of major developments

Major Developments:

1. Alphabet
2. Colonisation
3. Metalworking (iron and bronze)
4. The Homeric poems
5. Urbanisation and political unity

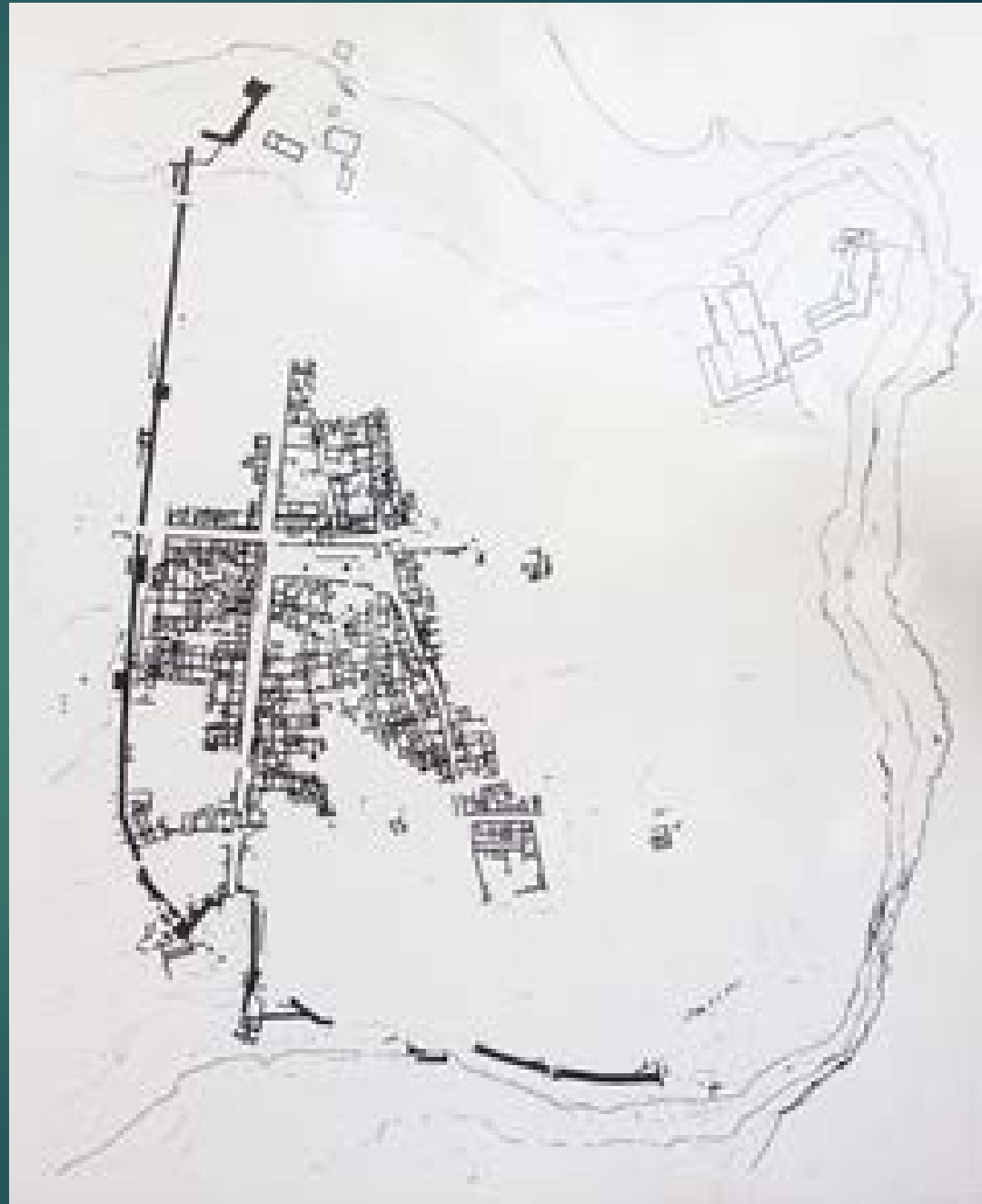
Urbanisation and the Polis

- ▶ Quite probably the most important of these developments in the 8th century was urbanisation and the creation of the polis.
- ▶ Urbanisation was the process by which individual communities coalesced into urban centres and politically into larger units
- ▶ Urbanisation is one of the major steps in the creation of polis as an independent political unit
- ▶ The polis was made of two parts. The urban centre, the asty, and the countryside, the chora.
- ▶ The asty became the political, religious and social centre of the new community.
- ▶ The importance of the asty was seen through the buildings and public space that came to characterise it.
- ▶ In the larger poleis, the urban centre (asty) made have had satellites in less accessible parts of the territory of the polis.
- ▶ Thus some demes such as Acharnai and Thorikos in Athens were smaller urban centres.

Urbanisation

- ▶ Of course in the 8th century the process was still in its infancy.
- ▶ But still the archaeological remains from the 8th century show that in most poleis the process had already started strong.
- ▶ That is especially true of the colonies, where centralisation was a major part of the colonising process.

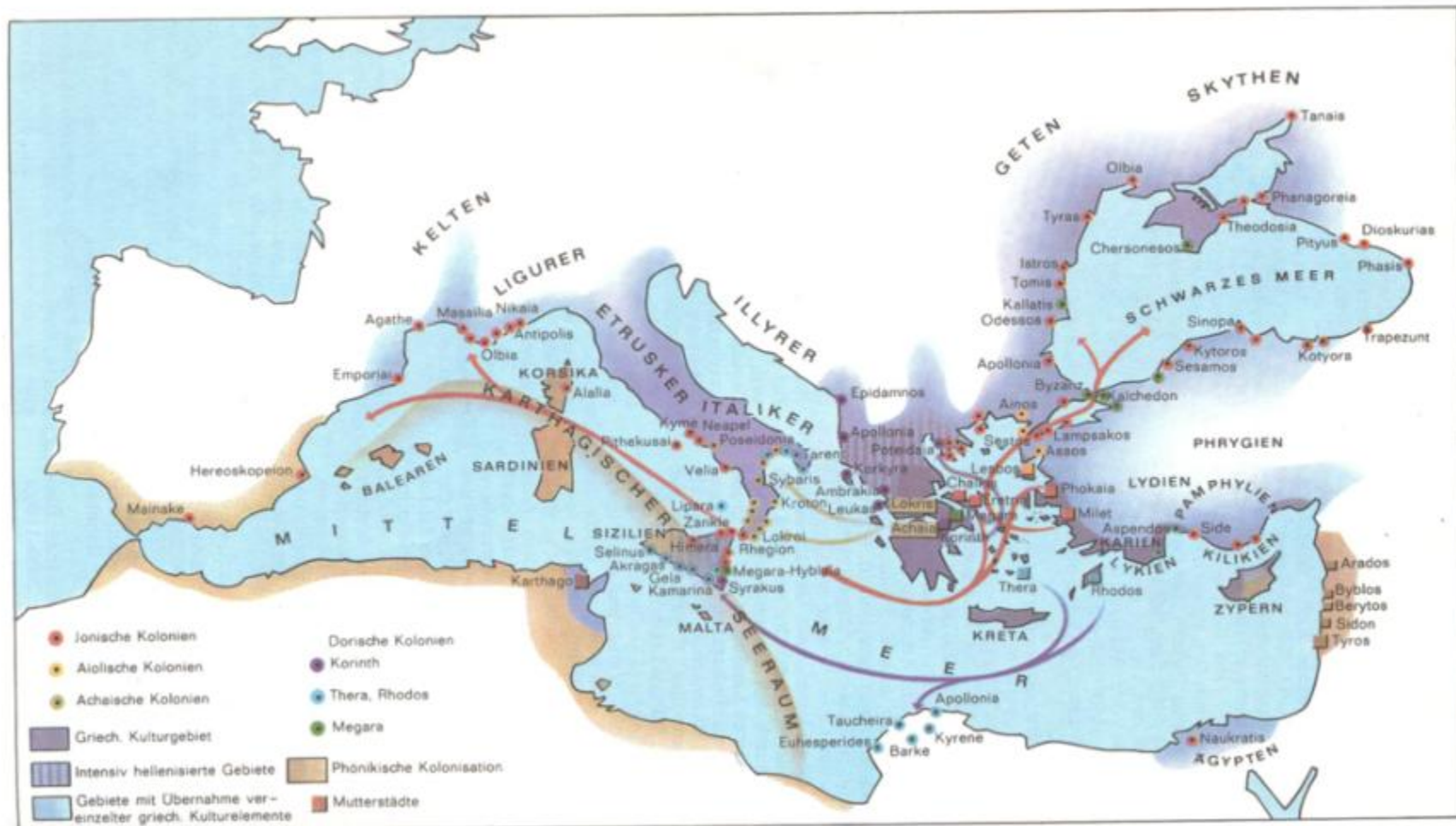
Site plan Megara Hyblaia



Colonisation

- ▶ Colonisation, mainly towards the west (Italy, Sicily, Gaul, Iberia) and the north (Thrace, Hellespont, Propontis, Black Sea), was one of the great developments of the 8th century
- ▶ The colonisation movement started in the 8th century and continued until the end of the archaic period but some of the most important foundations were made in the initial wave of the 8th century
- ▶ Many poleis took part in the 8th century colonisation, mainly from Euboea (Chalkis, Eretria), the Cyclades (Naxos, Paros, Rhodes) and the Peloponnese (Corinth).

Colonisation



Die griechische Kolonisation 750-550 v. Chr.

Metal-Working

- ▶ The 8th century saw one of the great advances in metal-working, mainly in bronze.
- ▶ The new techniques enabled the creation of stronger sheet bronze.
- ▶ It was used for statuary but more importantly in the making of bronze armour.



The Homeric Poems

- ▶ The Homeric poems were finding their common form in the course of the 8th century (!!NOT their written form, that would not come until the 6th century!!!)
- ▶ They were also achieving fame throughout the Greek world

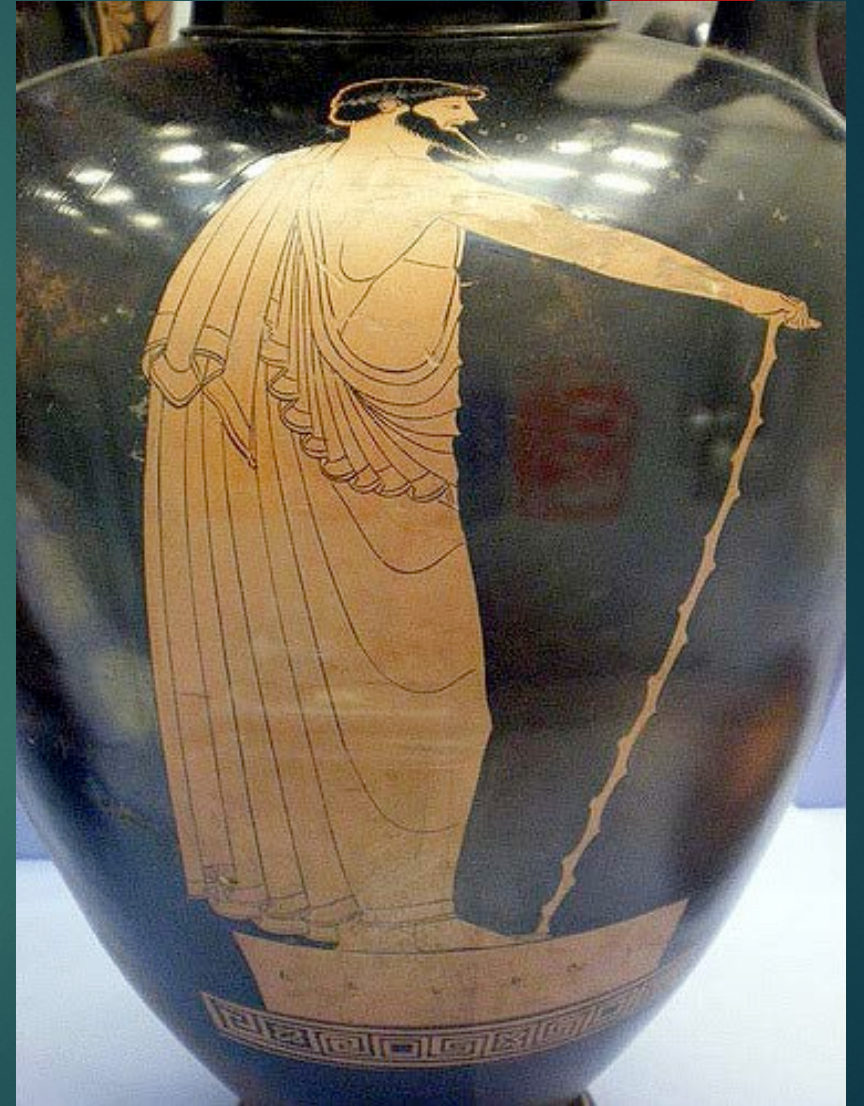
The Alphabet

- ▶ The 8th century is the time when writing is re-introduced in the Greek world after the lapse of Linear B at the end of the Bronze Age.
- ▶ The exact circumstances of the introduction of alphabetic writing in Greece and the Aegean are still a hotly debated matter
- ▶ There is no such thing as a “Greek” alphabet.
- ▶ Throughout the archaic period there were various different versions of the alphabet according to locality. These are called regional alphabets.

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Oral Composition

- ▶ A lot of poetry was originally composed orally, and sung
- ▶ So, music a key feature in many types of literature
 - ▶ Epic
 - ▶ Tragedy
 - ▶ Lyric



Singers in the Texts

- ▶ Some idea of the methods of performances from art and from the texts themselves
- ▶ For example,
 - ▶ We see bards in Homer
 - ▶ Pindar describes himself performing or makes references to his poetry and musical instruments



Bards in Homer

They leveled a place for the dance, and marked out a fair wide ring, and the herald came near, bearing the clear-toned lyre for Demodocus. He then moved into the midst, and around him stood boys in the first bloom of youth, well skilled in the dance, and they struck the sacred dancing floor with their feet. And Odysseus gazed at the flashing of their feet and marveled in spirit.

Next the minstrel struck the chords in prelude to his sweet lay and sang of the love of Ares and fair-crowned Aphrodite,

► *Odyssey* 8.261-67