

ROBIN WATERFIELD

THE
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ANTIGONUS GONATAS OF MACEDON AND THE GREEKS



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Robin Waterfield

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For Paul Cartledge
wise adviser

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Preface and Acknowledgments

When I wrote my general history of ancient Greece, *Creators, Conquerors, and Citizens* (2018), I found that researching the third century BCE was made more difficult by the lack of any accessible book on the period. The period is riddled with scholarly controversy, and no one has tried to pull it all together in a single volume. It is true, as I explain in the introduction, that the sources for the third century are meager, so that it often receives no more than a paragraph or two in the history books, but more can be said—and deserves to be said, as this book proves. So my intention is to open up even for general readers an obscure period of ancient Greek history. I have already done this for earlier and later stretches of the Hellenistic period in *Dividing the Spoils: The War for Alexander the Great's Empire* (2011) and *Taken at the Flood: The Roman Conquest of Greece* (2014); this book completes an unintended trilogy.

There is, as is usual for Greek history, warfare to be covered. Warfare was pervasive in the Hellenistic period; it decimated families, scarred the landscape, ruined entire states, forced towns to accept occupation by foreign soldiers, and generated countless memorials in the form of monuments and texts. There are colorful characters to sketch. But there are also important political matters to elucidate. This was a critical time in the history of the Greeks of the mainland, as two events highlight. First, the Spartan reformation of the 220s. Inspired by an earlier attempt in the 240s, the reformation of a strongly conservative society was preceded by decades of soul-searching, as greed undermined their social traditions and the

number of citizens plummeted to critical levels. Second, the rise of the great confederacies, which changed the political life of the Greeks forever. This was the most profound political shift in the Greek world since the original coalescence of states centuries before, and it deserves to be better known.

I chose to make Antigonus Gonatas, the king of Macedon from 276 until his death in 239, the hinge of this book. Greece had effectively been dominated by Macedon, Macedonians, and pro-Macedonian Greeks ever since Philip II defeated the Greek states at Chaeronea in 338 and formed many of them into the League of Corinth the following year, with himself as its president. By the time Antigonus succeeded to the Macedonian throne, the League of Corinth was long defunct, but he was still the representative of Macedonian dominion and hence the stimulus for at least some of the changes the Greeks were going through. He makes a good lens, therefore, through which to view this period of Greek history.

I do not mean to imply that I use Antigonus simply as a literary device; he is one of the least known and most underestimated figures in Greek history, and I want to give him the prominence he deserves. The longevity of his reign alone, in troubled times, argues for exceptional determination and strength. He inherited a Macedon that was an utter mess and turned it into a kingdom that would endure and flourish for over a hundred years, succumbing eventually only to the undeniable might of Rome. The qualities that he required do not necessarily make an amiable man, but they make a capable king.

Surely, then, it is only the paucity of sources for the period that has denied Antigonus his fame. He revived the Macedon that his predecessors had created, and put in place reforms as important and wide-ranging as theirs. He was successful in his dealings with the Macedonians, who were always his primary concern, but less so in his dealings with the Greeks, where powerful forces were ranged against him and he experienced extraordinary vicissitudes. Despite being almost constantly on a war footing, he found time to secure and reunite Macedon. He was a successful commander, more often than not, especially when it really counted. He deserves

a place in the gallery of memorable Macedonian kings, and this book is intended to be a biography of Antigonus, as well as a narrative history of the period.

The writing of history is the process of sifting the sources—works of literature, official state documents, coins, works of art, archaeological data—and transforming all this disparate material into a narrative. This transformation consists of far more than just putting the pieces together. That would be enough if the facts spoke for themselves, but they rarely do. Facts gain a voice, or at least speak more clearly, only when they are put into a certain context and framework by the historian (thus, incidentally, making all history-writing to a certain extent subjective). The lack of detailed information about the third century makes the contextualizing of it both more essential and more a matter of conjecture and imagination. Readers should be aware from the start that, for some events of the third century, my version may not be the only possibility. Even the dating of events is often a matter of informed guesswork.

The structure of the book is a response to the paucity of evidence. If we had good, contemporary accounts, preserving more of Antigonus' deeds and portraying his character, there would be less necessity to infer what he and his reign were like. But, as it is, he is one of those people who only come fully into focus against a background. The book therefore falls into two parts.

In the first part, I give the background. I recount relevant aspects of history over the six decades between the Macedonian conquest of Greece and the start of Antigonus' reign (that is, what scholars call the early Hellenistic period), focusing on the main states that impinged on his work as king of Macedon: Macedon itself, Sparta, Athens, the Achaean and Aetolian confederacies, and the kingdom of Egypt. These were the powers that were lined up for or, mostly, against him. In effect, these chapters delineate the main threats or concerns that Antigonus inherited along with his throne. He was born less than twenty years after the Macedonian conquest of Greece, and so his early life is woven into these chapters, but he is rarely the protagonist. That role is often taken by his grandfather

and father, however, so the first part of the book affords glimpses of Antigonus' family environment.

The same characters and events come and go in these first five chapters, with much the same span of time covered in each chapter, but from different perspectives. I would ask readers who are not conversant with the period to be patient: characters with names that at first are unfamiliar will be old friends by the time they have read on. Then, in the second part, I detail the history, insofar as it can be recovered, of Antigonus' reign itself. I cover not just the course of events, but his relations with his own people and with the Greek states, and the culture of his famous court. In a final chapter, I assess his legacy, especially in the context of the Roman conquest of Greece.

Much of the research for this book was carried out in Athens, where the staff of the Blegen Library of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, and of the Library of the British School at Athens, were their usual helpful selves. I would like to thank (again) my agent, Bill Hamilton; my two editors at the University of Chicago Press, Susan Bielstein and James Whitman Toftness; and Charlotte Loveridge, my editor at Oxford University Press in the UK. As well as commissioning the book, Susan also went through the typescript line by line, offering many suggestions for tightening and improving the text. Because the book was being published by two university presses on different sides of the Atlantic, I received no fewer than four useful reviews of my original proposal. I profited from both their advice and their encouragement.

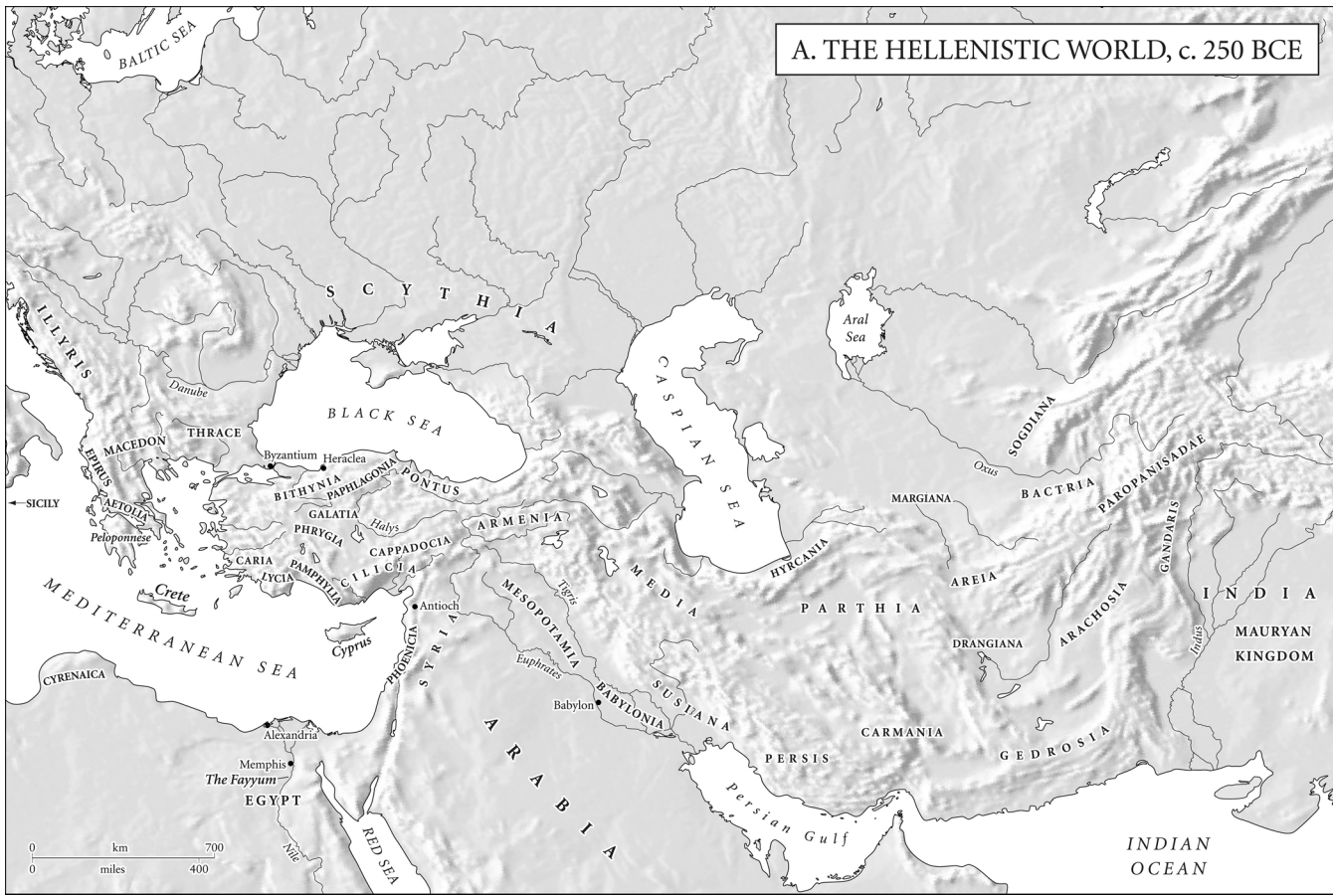
Various friends and colleagues sent me offprints of their work, or addressed specific questions; in the latter category, I am grateful to Tim Howe (access to research material), Richard Janko (Herculaneum papyri), Franca Landucci (a copy of her unpublished talk "Intellectuals and Culture in the Court of Antigonus Gonatas"), Andrew Lane (economics), Manuela Mari (Macedonian religion), Alexander Meeus (Greek-Macedonian relations), Shane Wallace (Greek-Macedonian relations, and unpublished Rhamnous inscrip-

tions), Kathryn Waterfield (resources for shipbuilding, and a hundred other questions), and Liv Mariah Yarrow (Pan coinage). Shane also gets a second round of thanks for his numerous and extremely helpful comments on the finished manuscript as one of readers for the University of Chicago Press, and I profited from the second reader's comments too. It was a great pleasure to work again with András Bereznay on the maps.

The book is dedicated to Paul Cartledge, the recently retired A. G. Leventis Professor of Greek Culture at the University of Cambridge, and the still active A. G. Leventis Senior Research Fellow at Clare College, Cambridge. For twenty years or more he has unfailingly and promptly answered my questions, reviewed some of my work before publication, and been my friend. There is a familiar figure from ancient literature, the "wise adviser," whose advice is ignored at one's peril. Along with a great many others, I thank Paul for his generosity, knowledge, and wisdom.

General Maps

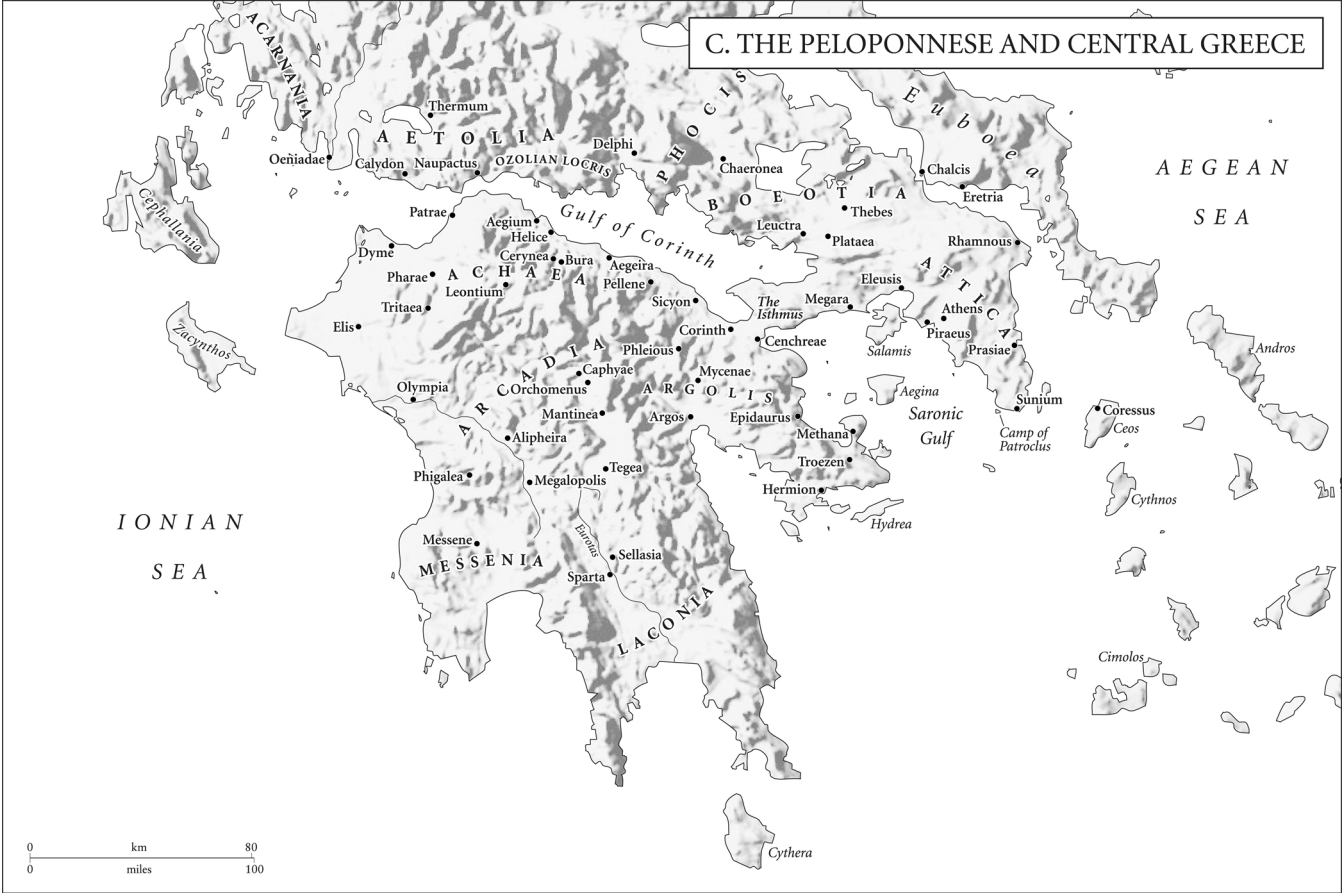
A. THE HELLENISTIC WORLD, c. 250 BCE



B. NORTHERN GREECE, MACEDON, AND THRACE



C. THE PELOPONNESE AND CENTRAL GREECE





Time Line and King Lists

- 338 Battle of Chaeronea; Macedon gains hegemony over the Greek states
- 336 Assassination of Philip II; Alexander III becomes king
- 334-323 Alexander the Great's eastern campaigns
- 323-322 Lamian War
- 319 Birth of Antigonus Gonatas
- 307-301 Demetrius Poliorcetes (Antigonus' father) ruler of Athens
- 301 Battle of Ipsus; collapse of Antigonid power
- 295 Antigonus in charge of southern Greece; Demetrius Poliorcetes takes Macedon
- 292 Antigonus defeats Boeotian rebellion
- 290s-220s Tyrannies in the Peloponnese
- 286 Athenians expel Antigonid garrison from the city
- 285-246 Reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus in Egypt
- 284 Demetrius Poliorcetes abdicates in favor of Antigonus
- 281-276 Repeated attempts by Antigonus to gain Macedon
- 280 Revival of Achaean Confederacy
- 279 Celtic invasion of Greece; death of Ptolemy Ceraunus; Macedonian throne becomes vacant
- 278 Nonaggression agreement between Antigonus and Antiochus I of Syria
- 277 Battle of Lysimachea (Antigonus vs. Celts)
- 276 Antigonus gains Macedon
- 276-246 Cyrenaica independent of Egypt
- 275 Marriage of Antigonus to Phila; birth of Demetrius II

274–272	Pyrrhus occupies Macedon
272	Death of Pyrrhus
272–239	Antigonus securely king of Macedon
c. 270	Antigonus campaigns against Ptolemy in Asia Minor
268–262	Chremonidean War
265	Death of Areus I of Sparta
263	Alexander II of Epirus invades Macedon
262–256	Athens under direct rule of Antigonus
261	Battle of Cos (Antigonus vs. Ptolemy)
258	Battle of Ephesus (Rhodes vs. Egypt)
257	Demetrius II becomes joint king with Antigonus
253	Antigonus founds festivals on Delos and builds stoa
252	Aratus' coup in Sicyon; expansion of Achaean Confederacy begins
250	Demetrius the Fair in Cyrenaica
249–245	Rebellion of Alexander of Corinth
249	Antigonus defeated at sea by Ptolemy II
246	Battle of Andros (Antigonus vs. Ptolemy)
245	Antigonus recovers Corinth
243	Aratus takes Corinth; Antigonus allies with Aetolians
239	Death of Antigonus
235–220	Alliance of Aetolians and Achaeans
229	Death of Demetrius II; Athens regains its freedom
200	Athenian <i>damnatio memoriae</i> of Antigonids

RULERS OF EGYPT (PTOLEMIES)

- Ptolemy I Soter (305–285)
- Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246)
- Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–221)
- Ptolemy IV Philopator (221–204)
- Ptolemy V Epiphanes (204–180)

RULERS OF MACEDON

- Philip II (360–336)

Alexander III the Great (336-323)
Philip III (323-317)
Alexander IV (323-308)
Olympias (for underage Alexander IV) (317-316)
Cassander (316-297)
Philip IV (297)
Antipater (297-294)
Alexander V (297-294)
Demetrius I Poliorcetes (294-287)
Pyrrhus (287-284)
Lysimachus (287-281)
Ptolemy Ceraunus (281-279)
Antigonus II Gonatas (276-239)
Demetrius II (239-229)
Antigonus III Doson (229-221)
Philip V (221-179)
Perseus (179-168)

RULERS OF SYRIA (SELEUCIDS)

Seleucus I Nicator (305-281)
Antiochus I Soter (281-261)
Antiochus II Theos (261-246)
Seleucus II Callinicus (246-225)
Seleucus III Soter (225-223)
Antiochus III Megas (223-187)

INTRODUCTION

A Time of Transition

In the winter of 252/1 BCE, a young man called Aratus took it upon himself, with the help of a few trusted friends and a band of mercenaries, to organize a coup in Sicyon, a small but prosperous state in the northeast Peloponnese, overlooking the south coast of the Gulf of Corinth. It was Aratus' native town, but he had been living in Argos ever since the assassination of his father, Cleinias, by a political rival thirteen years earlier. Besides, he was clearly at odds with the town's current ruler, Nicocles, who had only a few months earlier made himself the "tyrant," or unconstitutional sole ruler, of Sicyon by murdering the previous incumbent. Aratus' coup, vividly retold in Plutarch's *Life of Aratus*, succeeded; no blood was shed, and Nicocles fled into exile.

Despite the fact that Sicyon was in origin a Dorian town—the Dorians, one of the main ethnic groups of ancient Greece, had a strong presence in the Peloponnese—Aratus, with a mature head on his twenty-year-old shoulders, decided that its safety lay in joining the Achaean Confederacy, a federation of many towns of the north and northwest Peloponnese, which were populated by people who claimed a different ethnicity and spoke a different dialect of Greek. His youth may seem surprising, but this was an era of early death, so that men were often thrust into prominence at a young age.

Even after Aratus' coup, however, Sicyon remained troubled, and he needed funds to help quiet things down. He had invited back to Sicyon a large number of men who had been exiled by Nicocles or his predecessors, and it was going to be an expensive business to



The fountain-house of the gymnasium at Sicyon, which was built by Cleinias, the father of Aratus, when he was effectively the sole ruler of the city. Photo by author.

settle their claims for reparations, more than Sicyon could afford. He approached Antigonus Gonatas, the king of Macedon, with whom his father had been on reasonable terms, but Antigonus prevaricated. It was, in fact, a cheeky appeal by Aratus, since Nicocles, the tyrant he had ousted, had enjoyed tacit support from Antigonus, as had his predecessors. Everyone knew this, but the fact that Antigonus had left it tacit gave Aratus his opening. Aratus was planning to restore to Sicyon a large number of enemies of Macedon, turning it into an anti-Macedonian stronghold. It is no wonder that Antigonus prevaricated.

But Aratus had inherited from his father formal friendship not only with Antigonus, but also with Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt, and it was to Ptolemy that he then turned. He was promptly given twenty-five talents, but it was not enough. Aratus spent it on ransoming Sicyonian prisoners of war, which left unresolved the issue of compensation for the returning exiles, so he sailed to Egypt to ask for more.

Voyages by sea were often hazardous in ancient times, and Aratus did not have an easy time of it. A storm swept him off course, and the boat barely made land on the island of Andros, where he hid while being hunted by a posse from Antigonus' garrison. But he evaded capture and did eventually make it to Egypt, traveling part of the way on a Roman ship bound for Syria.

Ptolemy gave him a generous amount of money, 150 talents (900,000 silver drachmas; millions of dollars), in cautious installments, which the young man put to good use. Antigonus felt he had to do something:

Antigonus decided to try to win Aratus over to his side once and for all, or at least to drive a wedge between him and Ptolemy. Among his friendly gestures, none of which was at all welcome to their recipient, he once sent Aratus in Sicyon portions of the victims from a sacrifice he was performing to the gods in Corinth. And at the well-attended banquet which followed the sacrifice, he made a speech for all his guests to hear. "I used to think," he said, "that this Sicyonian boy had no more going for him than a noble and patriotic spirit, but it looks as though he's also a competent judge of the lives and affairs of kings. After all, in the past he used to ignore us. He had his gaze fixed hopefully abroad, because all the talk he was hearing of elephants and fleets and palaces gave him a high regard for Egyptian wealth. But now that he has seen behind the scenes there and realizes that everything is just play-acting and trumpery, he has come over entirely to our side. I myself welcome the young man. I have decided to involve him in all my affairs, and I require all of you to consider him a friend."

This was untrue, of course: Antigonus had not won Aratus' friendship. He was trying to start a rumor designed to undermine the relationship between Aratus and Ptolemy.

Whether or not the story is authentic—and the fact that Plutarch was drawing on Aratus' own *Memoirs* does not guarantee its veracity—it introduces us to some of the major players and themes of this book. Greece had become impoverished over the course of the

fourth century, chiefly as a result of endless wars fought either between Greeks, or at least on their lands. The Greek states were weak and poor, and those with large populations were not infrequently short of food. They needed the support of kings, despite the cost in terms of subservience, and so we see Aratus appealing to both Antigonus and Ptolemy for funds. The state and status of the Greek cities, which were supposedly self-governing even in this era of absolute kingship, will form one thread of this book.

The Greek world, vastly expanded since the eastern conquests of Alexander the Great (334–323), was in the early third century essentially divided between three great monarchical superpowers. The Ptolemies had Egypt, Cyrenaica (the northeastern coastline of Libya, in today's terms), Cyprus, parts of Arabia, and a great many possessions and friends along the south and west coasts of Asia Minor and in the Aegean. The Seleucids had Syria and all the lands east to Afghanistan and the Hindu Kush, and much of Asia Minor was theirs as well, the rest being divided between a number of smaller kingdoms and Egypt. And the Antigonids had Macedon and hegemony over the states of mainland Greece. In 278, Antigonus and Antiochus I Soter, ruler of Syria from 281 to 261, came to a world-changing agreement, whereby neither would interfere in the other's territory, and so Greece became a region where Egyptians and Macedonians vied for influence, just as in the story told by Plutarch Ptolemy outdid Antigonus by funding Aratus.

This was the essential dynamic in Greece for much of the third century. The great kings of Macedon and Egypt could challenge each other, with Greeks as proxies, without (usually) coming directly to blows and creating a major international incident. It was rather as if, today, the United States and Russia were using such tactics—propaganda lies, funding, and other expressions of support—to vie for influence in some modern, developed country; for, though impoverished, Greece was not the equivalent of a third-world state, and the Greeks were always aware of their proud history.

Naturally, this situation was resented by the Greeks, and this introduces us to another major dynamic of the period: the struggle of the Greeks to gain enough power to stand up to the kings on