

The origins of human culture

Early human migrations began when *Homo erectus* first migrated out of Africa over the Levantine corridor and Horn of Africa to Eurasia about 1.8 million years ago. The expansion of *H. erectus* out of Africa was followed by that of *Homo antecessor* into Europe around 800,000 years ago, followed by *Homo heidelbergensis* around 600,000 years ago, where they probably evolved to become the **Neanderthals**. All these **hominids** used stone to make tools and weapons, this is known as the **Paleolithic period** and lasted until about 8,000 BC. Amazingly, during nearly 2 million years there was almost no change or development in the kind of tools being used.

Modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, evolved in Africa up to 200,000 years ago. An exodus from Africa over the Arabian Peninsula around 60,000 years ago brought modern humans to Eurasia, with one group rapidly settling coastal areas around the Indian Ocean and one group migrating north to steppes of Central Asia. The inland group is the founder of North and East Asians (the "Mongol" people), Caucasoids (Europeans) and large sections of the Middle East and North African population. Migration from the Black Sea area into Europe started some 45,000 years ago, probably along the Danubian corridor. By 20,000 years ago, modern humans had reached the Western margin of the continent.

The **Last Glacial Maximum** (ca. 25,000-13,000 years ago) saw ice-sheets expand to cover all of northern Europe and Asia, down to the Alps and northern China. South of this was a virtual desert of tundra. Much of the earth was uninhabitable. The Late Glacial Maximum (ca. 13,000-10,000 years ago) is defined primarily by a process of accelerated deglaciation. It is at this time that human populations, previously forced into refuge areas as a result of Last Glacial Maximum climatic conditions, gradually begin to repopulate the northern hemisphere's Eurasian landmass and eventually populate North America.

The **Neolithic Revolution** was the world's first historically verifiable revolution in **agriculture**. It was the wide-scale transition of many human cultures from a lifestyle of **hunting and gathering** to one of agriculture and **settlement** which supported an increasingly large population. Archaeological data indicates that various forms of **plants and animal domestication** evolved in separate locations worldwide, starting around 12,000 years ago (10,000–5,000 BC). So far, all tools were still made of stone (or bone) but the tools of the farming populations were soon far more complex and sophisticated. Therefore this is known as the **Neolithic** or New Stone Age. Pottery too becomes far more important here.

A major change comes with the discovery of ways of smelting copper and tin. The **Bronze Age** is a period characterized by the use of copper and its alloy bronze (copper with tin) as the chief hard materials in the manufacture of some implements and weapons. Chronologically, it stands between the Stone Age and Iron Age. The Bronze Age in the ancient Near East began with the rise of Sumer in the 4th millennium BC. The **Iron Age** in the Middle East begins between 1200 BC and 1000 BC, diffusion in the understanding of iron metallurgy and utilization of iron objects was fast and far-flung. The extraction of usable metal from oxidized iron ores is more difficult than tin and copper smelting. These other metals and their alloys can be cold-worked, or melted in simple kilns and cast in molds; but smelted iron requires hot-working and can be melted only in specially designed furnaces. It was almost at once clear that adding carbon to iron to produce far tougher **steel** was the way ahead.

1. Mesopotamia

Some time soon after 5000 B.C., something vital happened to humanity. People began, in various places, at **Catal Huyuk** in Turkey, at **Babylon** in Mesopotamia, at Jericho in Israel, and elsewhere, to build large numbers of houses close together. The result was the first **cities**, the beginning of modern society, of urban living (Latin *urbs* means town). The Greek word for city is *polis*. Here too lies the beginning of "politics"! The earliest remains of towns to be found in Mesopotamia are dated to 5000-4000 B.C.

Mesopotamia lies between what is now called Armenia (between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea) to the North and the tip of the Persian Gulf to the South. From the Armenian mountains two great rivers, the **Tigris** and the **Euphrates**, flow down, roughly parallel, and the land between them, surrounded by desert, was made fertile by the annual floods caused by the melting of the snow in springtime. "Mesopotamia" means "land between the rivers" in Greek. It corresponds to modern Iraq.

To the South-East of Mesopotamia lies what was long called **Persia** (now called Iran), and beyond that, the great sub-continent of **India** into which Sanskrit-speaking Aryans were to bring a culture related closely to that of Western Europe. Mesopotamia itself was really a double cultural space. To the North lay **Assyria**, centered on Nineveh, to the South was **Babylonia** centered in the city of Babylon (sometimes called Babel in

the Bible), with the city of **Ur** not far from the Persian Gulf, in the South, and **Haran** (the home of Abraham in the Bible) far to the North.

Sumerian Culture

The first major culture to arise in Mesopotamia was that of the **Sumerians**, who arrived on the site of Babylon soon after 4000 B.C. and who maintained a strong influence over the whole area as far as the Mediterranean for almost 2000 years. At the same time, the Egyptians were independently developing a sophisticated culture in the valley of the Nile. There is no other known language related to the Sumerian language. While Western Europe was still in its **Neolithic** (New Stone Age) phase until 1700 B.C., **Sumerian civilization** was at its height and by 3000 had developed the earliest known form of writing, called **cuneiform**, pictograms written on soft clay by the triangular stem of the papyrus reed, then baked hard and preserved until today in the dry sands of the desert areas, or in the fires which destroyed the cities. The Sumerians discovered much of what we call technology and science. By 3500 they were smelting copper, gold and silver. By 3000, masons (builders) and smiths (metal workers) were specialists, wheeled vehicles were being used, and pottery was being made on the **potter's wheel**. Many have said that the **wheel** is the greatest human invention but no-one knows when or where it was invented first. Some time around 3000 the **loom** spread into Europe, another great advance, but at that same time, the Sumerians were inventing the **oil lamp** which allowed work to continue after nightfall, and, like the Egyptians and the Chinese, had begun scientific observations of the sun and the movements of the stars. In Egypt and in Mesopotamia, systems for writing numbers were invented.

One of the main factors in the development of Sumerian civilization was the need to come to agreement on the use of water in the irrigation canals on which agriculture, thus life, depended. In this way they discovered the need for **laws** which could be enforced with penalties, society became a structure of rights and obligations, something more than mere family or village ties. Sumerian culture was basically agricultural and until **metal coins** were invented (3000-2500 B.C.) they used barley as money. These first city-dwellers built special temples for the celebration of religious rites.

The main Sumerian deities are:

An: god of heaven, the firmament

Enlil: god of the air (from Lil = Air); patron deity of Nippur

Enki: god of freshwater, male fertility, and knowledge; patron deity of Eridu

Ereshkigal: goddess of the underworld, Kigal or Irkalla

Inanna: goddess of warfare, female fertility, and sexual love; matron deity of Uruk

Nammu was the primeval sea (Engur), who gave birth to An (heaven) and Ki (earth) and the first deities; eventually became known as the goddess Tiamat

A vital moment in history comes between 3000 and 2500 B.C.. New arrivals in Mesopotamia, settling in the northern area (**Assyria**) are speaking forms of **Semitic languages** which today have evolved into **Hebrew** and **Arabic**. At the same time, others move down into the very fertile coastal region of Lebanon (famous for its forests) and create the **Phoenician** towns of **Tyre**, **Sidon** and **Byblos**.

The First Assyrian Empire

Around the year 2300, **Sargon of Agade** took control of the whole of **Mesopotamia, parts of Syria and Asia Minor** and sent soldiers as far as Crete. This first example of far-flung control only lasted about 50 years but it is a sign that societies were emerging that were capable of great organization. What caused its collapse was the arrival of new groups. The **Semitic** newcomers, **Elamites** and **Amorites**, whose names are found in the Bible, seem to have given new energy to **Babylon**, which became a major centre of power under **Hammurabi** (1790-1750). Hammurabi is remembered as the first great codifier of **laws**. A stone column inscribed with his code is now in the Louvre.

From this time, for over 1000 years there is little change to report. The focus of our story moves to Egypt and then to Israel, where Mesopotamia plays a vital role in the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile of 587.

Mesopotamian Mythology

Sumerian society kept the old village system of "popular democracy", decisions being made by all the adult males after long discussions. The kings were more like priests, indeed, in many cultures the idea of

kingship seems to originate from sacred functions rather than from exercise of power. The main cult was linked to the fertility myths of the new year and the need to renew the gods' interest in the crops. The stories of the gods, varying through the centuries, were in the form of **myths** and came to be expressed in epic form; the most famous Mesopotamian epic is that of *Gilgamesh* but there are others, as well as songs lamenting the death of the shepherd god **Tammuz**, whose return from the dead heralded the return of fertility to the new year.

The Sumerian vision of the **gods** was similar to their experience of human society; the gods, each with particular but limited responsibility, are thought of as a **pantheon** where individuals are constantly fighting and competing with each other. Human destiny depends on the outcome of these quarrels. Each city is under a particular deity, who may for a while lose power to another, following which the city will also be conquered by that other god's city. Such **anthropomorphic pantheons** are equally found in Greece and Scandinavia, and there are many similarities. The great difference lies in the nature of the central figure. In the older system, widespread, the central focus is on the **Mother Goddess** whose son is the dying and reborn power of fertility. Later, almost everywhere, the Indo-European invaders introduce another set of figures, a **patriarchal** pantheon with the Storm God in some kind of position of often threatened power.

A summary of the story of the Flood from the epic *Gilgamesh*

In Mesopotamian mythology, Gilgamesh is a demigod of superhuman strength who built the city walls of Uruk to defend his people from external threats, and travelled to meet the sage Utnapishtim, who had survived the Great Deluge. He is usually described as two-thirds god and one third man. The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, an epic poem from Mesopotamia, is amongst the **earliest surviving works of literature**. The story centers on a friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Enkidu is a wild man created by the gods as Gilgamesh's equal to distract him from oppressing the people of Uruk. Together, they journey to the Cedar Mountain to defeat Humbaba, its monstrous guardian. Later they kill the Bull of Heaven, which the goddess Ishtar sends to punish Gilgamesh for spurning her advances. As a punishment for these actions, the gods sentence Enkidu to death.

The later half of the epic focuses on Gilgamesh's distress at Enkidu's death, and his quest for immortality. In order to learn the secret of eternal life, Gilgamesh undertakes a long and perilous journey to find the immortal flood hero, Utnapishtim. He learns that "The life that you are seeking you will never find. When the gods created man they allotted to him death, but life they retained in their own keeping." His fame however lived on after his death, because of his great building projects, and his account of what Utnapishtim told him happened during the flood.

In the time before the Flood, there was a city, Shuruppak, on the banks of the Euphrates. There, the council of the gods held a secret meeting; they all resolved to destroy the world in a great flood. All the gods were under oath not to reveal this secret to any living thing, but Ea (one of the gods that created humanity) came to Utnapishtim's house and told the secret to the walls of Utnapishtim's house, thus not technically violating his oath to the rest of the gods. He advised the walls of Utnapishtim's house to build a great boat, its length as great as its breadth, to cover the boat, and to bring all living things into the boat. Utnapishtim gets straight to work and finishes the great boat by the new year. Utnapishtim then loads the boat with gold, silver, and all the living things of the earth, and launches the boat. Ea orders him into the boat and commands him to close the door behind him. The black clouds arrive, with the thunder god Adad rumbling within them; the earth splits like an earthenware pot, and all the light turns to darkness. The Flood is so great that even the gods are frightened:

The gods shook like beaten dogs, hiding in the far corners of heaven,

Ishtar screamed and wailed:

"The days of old have turned to stone:

We have decided evil things in our Assembly!

Why did we decide those evil things in our Assembly?

Why did we decide to destroy our people?

We have only just now created our beloved humans;

We now destroy them in the sea!"

All the gods wept and wailed along with her,

All the gods sat trembling, and wept.

The Flood lasts for seven days and seven nights, and finally light returns to the earth. Utnapishtim opens a window and the entire earth has been turned into a flat ocean; all humans have been turned to stone.

Utnapishtim then falls to his knees and weeps.

Utnapishtim's boat comes to rest on the top of Mount Nimush; the boat lodges firmly on the mountain peak just below the surface of the ocean and remains there for seven days. On the seventh day:

I [Utnapishtim] released a dove from the boat,

It flew off, but circled around and returned,

For it could find no perch.

I then released a swallow from the boat,

It flew off, but circled around and returned,

For it could find no perch.

I then released a raven from the boat,

It flew off, and the waters had receded:

It eats, it scratches the ground, but it does not circle around and return.

I then sent out all the living things in every direction and sacrificed a sheep on that very spot.

The gods smell the odor of the sacrifice and begin to gather around Utnapishtim. Enlil, who had originally proposed to destroy all humans, then arrives, furious that one of the humans had survived, since they had agreed to wipe out all humans. He accuses Ea of treachery, but Ea convinces Enlil to be merciful. Enlil then seizes Utnapishtim and his wife and blesses them:

At one time Utnapishtim was mortal.

At this time let him be a god and immortal;

Let him live in the far away at the source of all the rivers.

At the end of his story, Utnapishtim offers Gilgamesh a chance at immortality. If Gilgamesh can stay awake for six days and seven nights, he, too, will become immortal. Gilgamesh accepts these conditions and sits down on the shore; the instant he sits down he falls asleep.

Utnapishtim tells his wife that all men are liars, that Gilgamesh will deny having fallen asleep, so he asks his wife to bake a loaf of bread every day and lay the loaf at Gilgamesh's feet. Gilgamesh sleeps without ever waking up for six days and seven nights, at which point Utnapishtim wakes him up. Startled, Gilgamesh says, "I only just dozed off for half a second here." Utnapishtim points out the loaves of bread, showing their states of decay from the most recent, fresh bread, to the oldest, moldy, stale bread that had been laid at his feet on the very first day. Gilgamesh is distraught:

O woe! What do I do now, where do I go now?

Death has devoured my body,

Death dwells in my body,

Wherever I go, wherever I look, there stands Death!

Utnapishtim's wife convinces the old man to have mercy on him; he offers Gilgamesh in place of immortality a secret plant that will make Gilgamesh young again. The plant is at the bottom of the ocean surrounding the Far-Away; Gilgamesh ties stones to his feet, sinks to the bottom, and plucks the magic plant. But he doesn't use it because he doesn't trust it; rather he decides to take it back to Uruk and test it out on an old man first, to make sure it works.

Urshanabi takes him across the Waters of Death. Several leagues inland, Gilgamesh and Urshanabi stop to eat and sleep; while they're sleeping, a snake slithers up and eats the magic plant (which is why snakes shed their skin) and crawls away. Gilgamesh awakens to find the plant gone; he falls to his knees and weeps:

For whom have I labored? For whom have I journeyed?

For whom have I suffered?

I have gained absolutely nothing for myself,

I have only profited the snake, the ground lion!

The tale ends with Gilgamesh, at the end of his journey standing before the gates of Uruk, inviting Urshanabi to look around and view the greatness of this city, its high walls, its masonwork, and here at the base of its gates, as the foundation of the city walls, a stone of lapis lazuli on which is carved Gilgamesh's account of his exploits.

2. Egypt

Far to the West of Mesopotamia, in North-eastern Africa, was **Egypt**, another great centre of early culture, equally vital, centred on the Nile which by its annual floods gave life to what would otherwise be desert, floods caused by the seasonal rains of tropical Africa. Since the Nile flows from South to North, it is only logical that **Upper Egypt** lies to the South, **Lower Egypt** to the North! The Nile flows into the Mediterranean in a huge **Delta**, the most fertile part and the cultural centre. Since the Nile Valley alone is irrigated, it forms a narrow fertile strip running through barren desert. The world-famous **pyramids** stand at Gizeh, near present-day Cairo, just where the Nile spreads into the delta. The Nile was vital, not only for water but also for transportation. Every year, the Nile overflowed its banks and covered the fields with a layer of fertile mud.

Egyptian History

Before 3000 B.C. the warrior king **Menes** united upper and lower Egypt and established the **First Dynasty**. In 2700 B.C. King Djoser founded the Third Dynasty, thereby beginning the period of the **Old Kingdom**, which lasts until 2200. He also built the **Step Pyramid** of Djoser, the first known pyramid in Egypt. During the Old Kingdom, the power of the pharaoh was absolute. By 2772 B.C. the Egyptians already had a **solar calendar** of 365 days and when the 4th dynasty Pharaoh Khufu, also known as **Cheops** died in 2560, he was buried in the **Great Pyramid** at Gizeh, the construction of which remains an amazing exploit. Soon after this, the famous **Sphinx** was built nearby.

Menes conquered the Delta using copper arrow-heads, but by 2500 the **Sumerians** had discovered that if you add 10% of tin to soft copper, the result is the very hard **bronze** with which it became possible to make real swords. The spread of the use of bronze indicates the passage from Stone Age (Neolithic) to **Bronze Age**, a transition that seems to happen in Western Europe and China at about the same time, independently. Since tin is rarer than copper, it was necessary to mine it and import it, international trade and banking had begun. At about this time too, cities began to build protective walls, and the number of weapons grew, humanity had discovered war. The citadel of **Troy** was probably founded around 2500 to protect the ships passing through the Dardanelles carrying tin.

Egypt developed very early a remarkable monumental culture familiar to everyone. Yet it remained largely isolated by the desert from other developed cultures, while the Egyptian **cult of the dead** has no parallel elsewhere. The system of writing in pictograms known as **hieroglyphics** was established at the beginning of the Old Kingdom and remained unchanged until the end of Egyptian culture during the Roman Empire.

The Old Kingdom collapsed in part because the construction of pyramids and the entire cult of the dead demanded too much from the country's population. It was followed by the **Middle Kingdom** in 2050. This social system collapsed in about 1750 because of power-conflicts between pharaohs and nobility and the **Hyksos** from Canaan and Syria took control of Egypt until they were expelled in 1560 and the **New Kingdom** was established, lasting until 1087.

In 1375 B.C. Amenhotep IV (**Akhenaton**), concerned about abuses in the Osiris cult of Egypt, proposed a new monotheistic religion, perhaps the first in world history, dedicated to the worship of the sun. He moved the capital of Egypt from Thebes to El-Amarna. The new religion did not last long; the cult of Akhenaton was abolished under the reign of his successor, the Pharaoh **Tutankhamen** (1352-1344), who moved the capital back to Thebes and returned to the old religion. Akhenaton's beautiful wife, **Nefertiti**, achieved her own position in world history thanks to her famous portrait bust with the elongated neck. These few years are above all noted for the elegant and sensuous quality of the art works they produced. The **tomb of Tutankhamen**, discovered and excavated during the 1920s, provided a large number of objects testifying to the sophistication of the art produced at this period.

Rameses II 'the Great' (1304-1237) built a new capital at the Nile Delta, and reaffirmed Egyptian power. The Bible story of Moses seems set in his reign. In 1182 his successor, Rameses III drove the 'Sea People' out of Egypt; they went to the coasts of Canaan and became the **Philistines** against whom David waged major campaigns. Rameses III was the last great Egyptian Pharaoh. In 750 B.C., the negroid inhabitants of Kush to the south invaded Egypt and took power without destroying the main culture; in 671, the Assyrians conquered Egypt in turn but within ten years their empire collapsed and Egypt regained its independence.

In 525 B.C. **Cambyses**, the son of the great Persian king Cyrus, took control of a much diminished Egypt; from about 343 B.C. the **Persians** ruled Egypt for a second time but in 332 - 331, **Alexander the Great** occupied Egypt and founded the city of **Alexandria**, where he was finally buried. His secretary, known as **Ptolemy**, founded a Hellenistic dynasty bearing his name in 305 and that family continued to rule Egypt until 31 B.C. when the last queen, **Cleopatra**, killed herself after the **Battle of Actium**. For almost 3000 years the culture of Egypt continued with little evolution; yet there is nothing significant to report in philosophy or literature. Almost all the land's energy and wealth went into the cult of the dead.

3. Israel

The region between the Sinai Peninsula and Lebanon, known by many names, as **Israel**, Canaan, the Holy Land, Palestine, has no clear natural frontiers. The River **Jordan**, rising in what is now called Lebanon and flowing directly South, runs through the middle, parallel to the Mediterranean coast, southward through the lake called the **Sea of Galilee** (or Lake of Gennesareth) and on down into the **Dead Sea** where its waters evaporate, leaving the Dead Sea so charged with salts that nothing can grow near it, whence its name. The Dead Sea is far below sea-level.

Almost all the events of the Bible stories happen in towns lying to the West, between the Jordan and the sea. **Jerusalem** lies west of the point where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea. The Bible stories have two main centres, especially in New Testament times, one the area around Jerusalem, called **Judea** or Judah, from which comes the word "Jew", the other the area to the west of the Sea of Galilee, called **Galilee**. Between these lies the area called **Samaria**.

Most of the Holy Land is now rocky and not very fertile, but in Bible times it seemed less arid ("a land flowing with milk and honey"). The Jordan is a small river, of no importance for transportation though useful for irrigation. Before the small groups of families (tribes) calling themselves "the Children of Israel" took control of the land, it was called **Canaan** and in recent times, before the creation of the modern state of Israel, the land was called **Palestine**. To the South stretches the great desert of **Sinai**, between Israel and Egypt, caught between the two branches of the Red Sea.

Early History: The Patriarchs

In the first book of the Bible, *Genesis* (meaning beginning, origin), we see nomadic figures moving across the empty spaces of the Middle East between Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean regions. Especially we see a particular family, with proper names: **Abraham**, his son **Isaac**, his son **Jacob** (who is also called **Israel**, whence the name of the people "the children of Israel"). In the Bronze Age period between 2000 and 1500, semi-nomadic **Amorites** were coming down from the Syrian deserts into the fertile lands of Canaan, as well as across into Assyria. Among them archaeologists have found names such as Abram, Jacob, Levi, Benjamin. Their flocks of sheep were their main wealth, but they also had some interest in farming; this is the life-style of the "patriarchs" (fathers). These first fathers of the future tribes of Israel were **Arameans**, people speaking various **Semitic** languages.

Movements of population brought members of these "foreign" tribes down into **Egypt**, where they took power as the **Hyksos** (foreign rulers), and controlled Egypt from 1720-1580, when the Egyptians threw them out and asserted their own power as far as the Euphrates. This control by Egypt was reaffirmed by **Rameses II** around 1300, and after a campaign in **Canaan** in about 1230, his successor could write "**Israel** is laid waste", the first historical use of the name in the sense of a place inhabited by a specific group of people known as Israel.

Moses and the Exodus

After these victories, the Egyptians used more and more Semitic slaves and prisoners-of-war in their extensive new building projects, a kind of sub-proletariate they called "*apiru*", a word also found in Mesopotamia as "**Habiru**", meaning low-class mercenaries or slaves from the poor nomads; it is probably the origin of the word "**Hebrew**". The well-known story of **Moses** (the name is Egyptian) who leads a group of escaping Semitic slaves out of Egypt (*Exodus*) and through the Sinai wilderness is rooted here. This

group is shown as united, although the people are of various family-origins, by the action of a tribal god with the four-consonant name יהוה **YHWH** (*Yahweh-el*), but the name was rarely spoken, he was called *Elohim*, the **Lord**; the familiar form "**Jehovah**" comes from a confusion, because the Hebrew Old Testament writes the vowels for *Elohim* over the **Tetragrammaton**.

For the next two centuries this original group of families, joined by others living in the hills of **Canaan** who accepted the same faith, fought to take control of the Canaanite villages in the fertile areas near the Jordan. They were an **amphictyony**, a league united by a conviction that the Lord had established a special **covenant** with them. Here they found themselves confronted with the **Philistine** problem. These were "People of the Sea" whom Rameses III had driven out of Egypt and who had settled on the coast of Canaan around 1150. They may have come originally from Greece, their culture was partly Mycenaean, and Homer mentions people with a similar name. They were stronger than Israel, partly because they had learned to make iron weapons, and in 1050 they defeated Israel and even captured the **Ark of the Covenant** (a wooden box or throne symbolizing the Lord's presence with Israel). The present name "Palestine" is derived from "Philistine".

The Jerusalem Kingdom

About 1000 B.C., it became clear to the religious leader (prophet) **Samuel** that the future of the amphictyony was in danger and that a strong **king** was needed to unite and lead the different families (tribes) living in Canaan that considered themselves to have been called by the Lord to take control of the land. The modern state of Israel still bases its existence on this notion of a **Promised Land** given them by God. Until now there had been no social organization beyond that of individual extended families, each with their elder patriarch. Some felt that the Lord was Israel's king and that no other leader was needed.

After a first attempt with **Saul** that failed, in about 1012 **David** became the new king, first in the South, where he crushed the Philistines. He was accepted by the remaining Canaanite populations, and imposed his rule so strongly that the surrounding peoples recognized his control over the whole land. Finally, he made the Canaanite city of **Jerusalem** his new capital, the centre of the Covenant, and so unifying the various groups and tribes. David's forty years of kingship (1012 - 972) were partly inspired by the forms of divine kingship found in Mesopotamia, adapted to Israel's unique vision of a God who saves in history through his **anointed servants**.

David's son, **Solomon**, (ruled 972 - 931) made Israel part of the Mediterranean world by joining forces with the **Phoenicians** in commerce, by adopting much of their culture and by building a **Temple** at Jerusalem in Canaanite style, using Phoenician building techniques. Solomon's court was extremely sophisticated artistically and culturally. In this time orders were given to record **in writing** all the stories of Israel's origins that until then had only been transmitted orally, the writing of the Bible had begun. Some of the earliest texts in *Genesis* were written at this time, including the familiar story of Paradise, the Temptation of Eve by the serpent, and the Fall, by an individual writer often known as the **Yahwist**. All animal sacrifices were forbidden outside the new Jerusalem Temple, as well, so centralizing the religious life.

After Solomon died, however, the nation divided, there was much conflict and the tribes of the North established the **Kingdom of Israel** centered on the city of **Samaria**, while those of the South continued in Jerusalem, the centre of the Kingdom of **Judah**. In 722, the **Assyrians** destroyed Samaria (and Damascus in Syria), and deported the people; the Northern Kingdom ceased to exist.

Exile and Return

For one thousand years, after Hammurabi had consolidated the unity of the **Assyrian Empire**, the main concern had been survival in a way of life close to that found in the Bible stories about Abraham and the patriarchs. Then, after the year 900, new energy brings the Assyrians into the Bible stories of the history of Judah, with wars and treaties involving kings such as **Sennacherib** (705-681).

Babylon was burned in 648, in response to a regionalistic uprising against the Assyrian kings, so the local citizens called in the **Medes** (who were Indo-Europeans) and in 612 **Nineveh** fell to the new dynasty. Under **Nebuchadrezzar II** (605-561) there was war with Egypt and invasion of Palestine. In **598** the people around Jerusalem (Judah) rebelled, the king and 3000 citizens were taken back to Mesopotamia. When the survivors rebelled again in 589, Nebuchadrezzar (also known as **Nebuchadnezzar**, reigned 605 - 561) destroyed Jerusalem after a siege which lasted until **587**.

This marks the beginning of the **Exile**, a vital time in Israel's history, for the Jewish exiles were not dispersed among the population of Mesopotamia; they continued to live close together. Their special religion served as a uniting force, and while studying the written "scriptures" (writings) they had brought with them, rewriting other records, and so composing the core of the **Jewish Bible** (called the **Old Testament** by Christians) they waited for the Lord of their past history to save them as he had saved their forefathers from Egypt. Since the Lord had always acted in history through human agents, and not by some

kind of divine intervention, it was no great surprise when the long-awaited liberation from Exile and return to Jerusalem came from the Persian king **Cyrus** in 536, after his conquest of Babylon.

There they rebuilt the **Jerusalem Temple**, which was rededicated in 516. Only later, around 445, did they rebuild the city walls. Almost two generations had lived and died away from the "Holy Land", yet they had forgotten nothing of their faith. This miraculous return from Exile and apparent disaster did not mean that Judah was able to become an independent state. Like Egypt, it remained part of the **Persian** zone of influence until the campaigns of **Alexander the Great** changed the face of the region. After that, the Jews were ruled by either the Ptolemies of Egypt or the Seleucids in Syrian Antioch.

4. Greek History

Greece stands at the gateway to Europe, whether you are coming from Turkey across the sea, or down along the north coast of the Black Sea. It is divided into two parts by the Gulf of Corinth, the southern part, the **Peloponnese**, being attached to the mainland by a narrow isthmus, with the town of **Corinth** just to the south, and at the northern end **Athens**. The area around Athens is called **Attica**. In the Peloponnese, the central area is known as **Arcadia** and although it is really composed of very arid, barren hills, it has traditionally been represented as an idyllic area of "pastoral" living, the home of simple shepherds in a golden age of romance and poetry. Historically, the most important city in the Peloponnese was **Sparta**, the great rival of Athens and its opposite in so many ways.

Greece is a rocky, hilly land, not fertile except in the river valleys. The sea to the east is full of islands, the Cyclades, and the sea has always played a great role in the history of Greece. To the south lies the island of **Crete**, which saw the rise of a sophisticated culture (the "Minoan") before anything similar came to Greece. A related culture is found in Greece in the remains of the town of **Mycenae**, to the east of Corinth.

The highest mountain in Greece, Mount **Olympus**, lies in Thessaly, known also as **Macedonia**, in the North East, and became the legendary home of the gods. Macedonia is the northernmost gateway to Greece. **Alexander the Great** was a Macedonian.

Between Europe and Asia Minor, separating the two, lie the **Bosphorus** and **Dardanelles Straits**, running from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean. On the northern shore lay the village of **Byzantium** that in late Roman times was to become **Constantinople** (now Istanbul), while at the westernmost end, to the south, lay **Troy**, the city of Priam in literature, to which Paris carried off the beautiful Helen. To the south of Troy, along the coast of what came to be called **Ionian**, the Ionian Greeks established cities, the most famous of which was **Ephesus**.

Early Greek History

In about 1950 B.C., fairly primitive bands of **Indo-Europeans** began to come into northern Greece, where they found people speaking a language similar to that spoken across the Middle East and living at quite a high cultural level. During the next four hundred years, they slowly spread down and took dominant positions in every local community they found, learning the culture, but introducing the language they had brought with them. This is the language that became **Greek**.

The **Indo-European** family/group of languages seems to have originated in the Northern plains, the Central Asian Steppes, among nomadic groups with no clear racial characteristic in common but with a male-centered culture that had learned to use the wheel and to herd cattle and sheep, moving pastures with the seasons. The spread of these groups occurs in waves, not as vast invasions by armies but as an infiltration of small family groups using various techniques when dealing with opposition. At times they would use force, at others they would make themselves welcome by peaceful means.

At about the same time as the Greek-speakers came down towards Greece, similar groups were spreading towards **Italy**, speaking what was to become **Latin**, and across to France and Britain where their **Celtic** language still survives in parts of Ireland, Wales, Scotland and Western France. Another group, also speaking the same kind of language, was descending towards India, speaking what is now called **Sanskrit**. By about 1600 B.C., these latter **Aryans** (meaning "noble people" although they were quite barbaric) were probably in India, where their literature and language are remarkably preserved in the "**Upanishad**" tradition, and the hymns of the **Rigveda**.

For the later Greeks, any language that was not Greek seemed rough and uncivilized; they called it "barbaric" to imitate the sounds they heard, the people speaking it are the original "barbarians". It certainly seems that the Indo-European form of language must have had some special quality, since it generally replaced the existing languages in areas penetrated by relatively small groups of settlers. There is simpler grammar, clearer structure...

Crete

The discovery, at the beginning of the 20th century, of the ruins of **Knossos** in Crete, excited much interest. A huge city-palace founded around 1900 B.C. with houses two stories high, with beautifully painted walls showing young people jumping over the backs of bulls while very elegantly dressed ladies watched!

Tablets with writing in an unknown alphabet that came to be called **Linear B** and that Michael Ventris discovered was an early form of Greek language! Buildings so sophisticated that there were even flush toilets! A rich culture, yet with no fortifications or walls. Evans, who excavated all this, called the culture "Minoan" from the name of the legendary **Minos** of Greek stories, who lived in Crete. These were probably little or no real connection

In the centuries following 2000 B.C., Crete was exporting very beautiful pottery and jewels to Egypt and the Middle East, trade was the life of the culture and Crete had much experience of the sea. Then, in about 1480 B.C., the Eastern Mediterranean experienced a terrible disaster. A volcano on the Greek island of **Thera** collapsed, the sea poured in and there was an explosion probably greater than that of Krakatoa (A.D. 1883), so that tidal waves destroyed harbours and coastal towns everywhere in the eastern Mediterranean. The city of Knossos, being away from the sea, escaped although it had suffered from earthquakes in the past. Yet a few centuries later, around 1400 - 1100 B.C., Knossos suddenly ceased to exist, the ruins show signs of fire and they seem to have been emptied of all precious things before being abandoned. What happened? Crete suddenly became a quite backward island, with only memories of its early cultural splendour.

Mycenae

From about 1600, Knossos was increasingly colonized by the mainland Greek city of **Mycenae**, which was in an important position on the route to the Isthmus from the Peloponnese. At this time, Mycenae suddenly learned many "Minoan" lessons, making pottery in Cretan style, making and using very elegant ornaments of gold and ivory, living in big, decorated houses, and burying its dead lords with fantastic treasures of gold which were found by Schliemann in the late 19th century.

First settled in 2,700 B.C. Mycenae was a Greek **city-state** (polis) ruled over by a king, like others of the time, but it became a cultural centre from which the products and styles of the Middle East spread into Europe. It is at this time that Stonehenge arose in England, and there are signs of contacts with Mycenaean culture there. When Knossos collapsed, Mycenae took over its commercial role and for the first time the dominant trading ships between the coasts of Lebanon and Egypt were Greek, from Mycenae. At this time, the first Greek **settlers** (colons) seem to have gone to live in Sicily and Southern Italy. **Grain, grapes and olives** (yielding wine and olive oil) were the main products for trade.

The society of Mycenae and the other rising cultural centres in Greece seems to have been patriarchal, feudal. Each local king lived in a palace at the centre of which was a **communal hall**, *megaron*, with a pillared porch at one end, a fire-place for an open fire in the middle, and a bathroom near the entrance, so that the arriving guest could wash on entering (washing had religious meaning). Around the hall were the storage rooms, women's quarters etc. It is the kind of palace and the kind of society we find described in Homer's *Odyssey*.

By now the incoming "Hellenes" (the original name for these arriving Greek-speakers is lost, Homer calls the people living on the Greek mainland *Achaioi*) had introduced their various gods who, like themselves, lived in a male-dominated **patriarchal** village society located at or above the summit of **Mount Olympus**, under the less-than-perfect control of the main Father-god, **Zeus** the sky-lord, with his rainbow messenger and lightning weapon (thunder-bolt). This **pantheon** of different gods from different sources never really learned to live together, there were so many different stories about each one; at the same time the old matriarchal **fertility religion** continued as well, with its legends of Persephone, daughter of the Great Mother, carried down into the underworld by the god Hades for half of each year.

The quarrelling, jealous, passionate gods of Olympus reflect the people of this period. Mycenae became rich, but after about 1200 life became almost impossible and the social system broke down. The main reason seems to have been war, not between nations but constant raids by land and sea, every lord and his followers trying to get more wealth by looting and stealing from those weaker. It is the same, bad side of "heroic" society that we find later in Old English poems like "Beowulf". Piracy increased, so that sea-contact between Greece and the East stopped almost entirely for centuries, and Mycenae itself **ceased to be an inhabited city**. It is just at this time, around 1200 B.C., and in just this society, that the events remembered in literary form in the great Greek legends of **Thebes** and of **Troy** must have happened. **Agamemnon** is shown as king of **Mycenae** or **Argos**, **Menelaus** as king of **Sparta** (then called **Lakedaimon**), there were

other kings at this time in the cities of Athens (less important), and Boiotia. The stories in Homer and the great tragedies remember this age.

The Dorians, Ionia, and Heroic Legend

Why, around 1200, do **all** the old, Mycenaean cities cease to be inhabited? Where did the people go? Maybe a new wave of fierce invaders, the **Dorians**, are to blame? Great poverty descended on Greece and many cities, like Mycenae itself, fell into ruins for ever, even the sites of some were forgotten. People left the mainland and went to settle on the west coast of Asia Minor, south of Troy. Here, in the region called **Ionia**, life continued for people from **Attica** and the **Peleponnese** (Athens was one of the only cities not to be conquered by the Dorians and therefore became so important later). In Ionia rose cities like **Miletos** and **Ephesos**, and it was for a time the centre of Greek civilization. Early philosophy also developed here. The Ionians, although now living in Asia Minor (now Turkey), thought of themselves as Greeks and remembered the stories of "life back home". They sang the old songs, repeated the old, heroic stories, learned the names of the old, dead kings. They also repeated the old stories of monsters and terrors to be met with in lonely islands by solitary travellers. In 850 B.C., or maybe 700, nobody knows, these traditions became the source-material for two poems, the *Iliad* (the story of Ilion/Troy) and the *Odyssey* (the story of Odysseus / Ulysses) and the Greeks say that the author of these two epics was called **Homer**. Nothing at all is known of him, seven cities in Ionia claimed him, perhaps **Chios** having the better claim. A little later, another poet of the same tradition wrote, in a *Hymn to the Delian Apollo*, "if anyone asks who is your favourite poet, say 'he is a **blind man**, and dwells in craggy Chios'." Since then, people have said that **Homer was blind**.

The First Named Poet : Homer

The dating of **Homer's** work is a great problem. The heroic *Iliad* and the more comic *Odyssey* show forms of society that ceased to exist around 1200 B.C.. Their poetic techniques are partly those of **oral tradition**, of a culture in which only memory transmits the past, since there is no art of writing. Oral poetry has no fixed text, since the poem is re-created at each performance, and relies on many stock **formulae**. These formulae can be found in Homer's work, but there is something more. First, both these great **epics** are **very long**, 24 Books, a challenge both for memory and for audience attention. More remarkable, there is complete control of the structure of the narrative, both epics are marked by structural coherence, by a fundamental unity. Finally, the composition of narrative detail and of dramatic speeches is marked by a poetic skill of the highest order, unparalleled later.

The later 19th century liked to claim that the *Iliad and Odyssey* were products of "collective creation," resulting from the genius of a whole people without any one individual poet standing as an author. Today, the work of a controlling poet is seen everywhere, in the organization of the material and in the poetry, he must be called **Homer**. Only who was Homer? His (or her?) dates cannot be fixed; perhaps he lived in 850, perhaps in 700, certainly in Ionia.

As works of narrative poetry, these two poems are perhaps the greatest ever written, and they are **the oldest in Europe**. They are marked by many stories about the Olympian gods, but they are not very religious or serious stories! They also have a deep feeling for human joys and sorrows; the greatest warriors are not ashamed to weep. For the Greeks, these poems were the source of wisdom and vision.

Hesiod

At about the same time as Homer, if he lived around 720-700, another poet was composing verses, this time in mainland Greece, on **Mount Helicon** near Delphi. **Hesiod** is the other **founder of Western Literature**. While the poet called Homer tells us nothing of himself in his works, Hesiod is the first poet in history to introduce himself into his poems and to make his biography a central feature.

Hesiod composed two works that are preserved; he too could probably not write, he shows oral features in his *Theogony* and his *Works and Days*. The former tells the theological history of the cosmos, introducing stories about some **300 gods** in a poem that begins with a **hymn to the Muses**. Hesiod does not explain how things arose, but brings together anthropomorphic Olympian gods and more abstract, personalized forces such as **Strife (Eris)**, Love (**Eros**), and **Fate** in a confused mixture not unlike that found in Homer. It was precisely this confusion, and the impossibility of taking the Olympians seriously, which provoked the later reflections of the philosophers.

The Phoenicians, the Greek Alphabet

In about 750, settlers from the town of Chalkis on the large island of Euboia, north-east of Athens, set out to establish a trading base to the west, in Italy, in collaboration with other cities. They established the town of **Cumae**, not far from Naples. Not long before, the Greeks had learned the **alphabet** from the **Phoenicians** and the settlers from Chalkis took their form of it with them to Italy, where it became the **Roman alphabet** in which this text is written.

When the Greeks took their alphabet from the Semitic Phoenicians, they were taking a series of

pictograms, each bearing the **name** of the object represented. The Greeks continued to use these names for the letters, although they did not know the meaning of the words and forgot that the letters were really pictures. "**Alpha**" (in Hebrew "Aleph", the Hebrew alphabet is based on the same tradition), our "A", is in fact the drawing of an **ox**, which is the meaning of "Aleph". "**Beta**" ("Beth", as in the biblical place-name "Bethel", the "House of God") means a **house**, our "B" represents a house. The sound value of each letter is the initial sound of its name.

By a stroke of genius, the Greeks adapted some of the letters to represent **vowels** (A, E, I, O) while the Semitic alphabets only represented **consonants**. The Old Testament was originally written without vowels, the Jews only began to indicate vowels by a system of 'pointing' after 700 A.D. (the "Massoretic text"). A number of Greek letters, such as the well-known final "Omega" (its name simply means "Big O"), were invented separately.

One of the main Phoenician centres, not far from present-day Beirut, was the port-city of **Byblos**, which some Greeks thought to be the oldest city in the world. It was a major trading centre and the Greeks gave its name to the "**Papyrus**" (= paper) made in Egypt from the stems of reeds, because it was often imported via Byblos, no doubt. Papyrus **scrolls** were the old form of book (in Greek *biblion*, plural *biblia* whence the word **Bible** = The (holy) books).

At about the same time, Phoenicians set up a trading centre on the North African coast, the city of **Carthage**, which was to be a great rival with Rome in later centuries.

Greek Colonies

There was fierce competition between the Greeks and the Phoenicians although there were many more Greeks available. There were in fact more Greeks wanting to own land than there was land available in Greece, so that when the Cumae experiment was successful, every Greek *polis* started similar **colonies**, in Italy, in Sicily, and even as far as the southern coast of France, where what is now **Marseilles** began c. 600. In **Sicily**, settlers from Corinth took over the best harbour and founded **Syracuse**, later to be the greatest city of Greek Sicily and famous for its links with Plato.

Other settlers went in the opposite direction and founded Greek cities around the Black Sea and in the Middle East. Other Greeks went in search of trade with **Egypt**, before 700, and by their stories the cultural wonders of ancient Egypt became known in Greece, where they had an important influence on **temple architecture** and on **sculpture**, especially. At this time, Greece was beginning to discover the visual arts, particularly **pottery**, which it began to export.

Since Italy and Sicily are less mountainous than Greece, more fertile, the new *colonies* (settlements) soon became richer and bigger than the original founding cities, and could export grain back to Greece, which always needed it. Greek culture was strong enough to survive, especially since the original inhabitants of Italy had little of their own, and the settlers often made visits to Greece, especially for the festivals at **Delphi** and **Olympia**. This latter festival held in western Greece was originally in honour of the **Great Goddess**, but after being taken over by Olympian Zeus, the place was renamed Olympia. Legend says that the **Olympic Games** began in 776 B.C., but they are probably much older. Games were a form of sacred activity in Greek culture, a way of honoring the gods by human prowess.

The City-State

When Greek history (as opposed to legend and archeology) begins with the introduction of the **Greek alphabet** around 700 B.C., the population is divided between those living in **towns, the city-states** (*polis*), and those living out on farms some distance from the towns. Each city was surrounded by fields in the plain which supplied it with food; each city was tempted by the crops in the fields of other cities in times of famine or war, and raids were common, as were inter-city wars for other reasons. The towns were walled and sometimes, as in Athens, had a specially strong "**upper city**" **Acropolis** for ultimate defense. The feudal kings of Homer's heroic society disappeared during the difficult times and the government of the cities was in the hands of a **Council** of the "**Best People**", the *aristoi* (= **aristocracy**), who were from the important, noble families, those with most land and able to afford a horse and armour to help defend the city in times of trouble. The **Council** of Athens (*Boule*) is better known under the name of the **Areopagus**, from the "Hill of Ares" where it usually met.

The Council would appoint executive officers, judges etc., at first for life, but later it was found better to **change each year**. There was also an **Assembly** (*Ekklesia*), composed of all the male citizens qualified to carry weapons, called usually to hear the decisions of the Council. Later, this Assembly became the main power in Athens, when Democracy was at its height. In the citadel of the upper town, where there had been a king's palace, they built a temple for the patron deity.

In Athens, at least, the old kings had proved helpless in times of war, so the nobles had elected a "General" (war-chief) to help. Then they also elected an **Archon**, or Regent, at first for life, to exercise most

real power. The king (*Basileos*) remained with the sacred functions involving sacrifices etc. in the name of the city.

Even in democratic Athens, there was a person called βασιλεύς "king" (the judge at the trial of Socrates had the title), but now chosen annually, together with the **Archon**, who ranked highest, and the War-Chief, who ranked third. In addition, later, they chose six judges because all the work was too much for the Archon, the chief judge, to do. The king was the judge in religious cases, including murder (the shedding of blood brought a curse, as at the beginning of *Oedipus*). Thus, Athens was finally governed by nine Archons.

At times of deep social discord, it became impossible for the citizens to agree, and the archon or archons could not be elected for the year. This is the origin of the word "**anarchy**" (no archon, no ruler, no law).

Social Change

With the explosion in international trade, new **social classes** grew up in the cities: ship-owners, manufacturers with 50-60 slaves, farmers. Around 625, the inhabitants of the city of Aigina became the first Europeans to use **coined money**, which they learned from the Lydians in Asia Minor. The result was a large increase in the number of newly **rich people** who wanted to be part of the *aristocracies* but who were often not admitted to the Council by the old families. Their other demand was for land, and this could not be solved by sending these people to Italy, as had been done previously.

The result was **Revolution**, with some high-born discontent leading the others in a rising, expelling the old powerful families and taking power for themselves. This power was then usually exercised in an autocratic way by the new leaders, who were known as *tyrannoi*, meaning "The Boss". The tyrant was usually at first highly popular, since he would distribute the land of the expelled families to his companions and build socially useful things such as aqueducts for water. He would then begin to act like a despot, surround himself with security guards, and finally be overthrown, although a few lasted as much as seventy years or more (Corinth). The result was much social unrest, as differences within society grew.

Sparta and Athens were now to arise as the major centres of Greek culture and power, their rivalry would dominate the next centuries.

Sparta

The Dorian city of Sparta, which came to dominate the cities of the Peloponnese, was an early centre of refined culture but soon it became the dominant city over a wide rural area and the problem of keeping control arose. Under the "true Spartans" there were many "serfs" called *helots*, who farmed the land and also acted as foot-soldiers, while the **Assembly** of the city was made up of the men aged over 30 from only a small number of families. These high-class families were the only true "Spartans".

In order to keep control of this unstable situation (there were far more helots than Spartans), at some time before 600 B.C. the **Spartan life-style** was developed. Traditionally it is ascribed to Lycurgus. Basically it was a conservative, totalitarian socio-military system, which lasted for several centuries, under which the boys of the Spartan families were taken from their homes at the age of seven and put to "school" in packs until they were twenty. During this time they were trained in a very hard way, sleeping on rushes, wearing the same clothes winter and summer, eating rough food, learning to be total soldiers. At twenty they had to apply for membership of a group (15 soldiers in each), and from that time they lived together, even after marriage when they were thirty. Weak babies were exposed, girls also had a tough program of physical training, and the main activities of the men were military training, hunting, athletics. The only art forms that survived were the Dorian choral songs and dances, but they did not develop. Sparta for a long time refused to use money, and in theory all lived in complete equality.

The result of this was the finest army in Greece, but a life of total austerity, no individual freedom, and rigid, conservative, oligarchic government. Around 550-510 Sparta organized the "**Peloponnesian League**" of cities, a kind of "united states" in which independent cities undertook to unite their armies in times of war. This made Sparta the leading force in Greek affairs, also in the struggles against tyranny, and culminated in the victory against the Persians. The Peloponnesian War against Athens, first 460-446, then again 431-404, leading to the surrender of Athens in 404, weakened Greece and in the end led to its decline.

Athens 600 - 400

The area around Athens, **Attica**, was good farming land, and quite large, so that Athens did not establish colonies as other cities were obliged to do by their excess population. But by 600, the introduction of money and the international market economy had created a wide gap between rich and poor, with the rich selling grain abroad while the poorer citizens of Athens starved. The laws were no help; if you could not pay your debts, you and your family were sold as slaves by the creditor. The **laws** were known only to the high-class judges, whose sentences thus appeared arbitrary. About 624, **Draco** published the "Draconian" laws, under which death was the punishment for most crimes.

By 594, reform was urgent, and **Solon** introduced the first reform in Athens. He cancelled all debts, had those who had been sold as slaves bought back by the city, forbade the export of agricultural products, and redefined the position of the **Assembly** (*ekklesia*), to which all free male citizens were to belong, even those without land. **Athenian Democracy** was essentially participatory, almost nothing important was decided by representatives.

Since participation in the Assembly took time, and was often boring, it soon became necessary to oblige people to take part. Security-guards went round the streets with **ropes dipped in red paint** stretched between them, directing the people towards the **Agora** (Market-place) where the meetings were held. In English, the expression "being roped in" still describes unwilling participation in some activity. Solon also reorganized the Athenian class-structure into four groups, according to income. Laws also were made more humane. The result was general discontent! Solon went travelling, after making the city swear to try his system for ten years.

From about 560 until 510, Athens was controlled by **Pisistratos**, who became tyrant in 546 after a surprise return from abroad. He ruled with Solon's constitution and was a popular figure. He died in 528 and was followed by his sons who degenerated into "tyrants" ruling by terror until Hippias was driven out in 510. During this time, Athens became a financial power, exporting the finest pottery, developing sculpture for the first time, gathering poets from other cities (Solon had been the first Attic poet) and growing into a rich, international city.

With the fall of the **Pisistratids**, their long-time rivals, the **Alkmeonid** family, returned in the person of **Cleisthenes**. The oracle at Delphi kept telling Sparta to "liberate Athens" (Cleisthenes had just spent much money rebuilding the temple at Delphi!) and after a bitter power struggle, in which Sparta was on the "wrong", conservative side, in 508 the people of Athens took to the streets in a two-day long uprising in favour of Cleisthenes and he introduced "democracy" in its full form in his reforms. Sparta tried once, the next year, to oppose him, but the citizen-soldiers of the other cities refused to fight.

[By coincidence, at just the same time, in **Rome**, in a similar move, the citizens drove out the last king, **Tarquin the Proud**, and introduced a form of democracy, electing the first two consuls of the **Roman Republic**.]

Cleisthenes created new divisions in Athenian society, no longer corresponding to wealth, or region, but uniting people of different origins, different social levels and different districts. These artificial units, called "tribes", had no real identity, so that the people would act in great unity. Each citizen lived in a neighbourhood known as a *demos* and this decided which tribe he belonged to. Hence, *democracy*.

The administration of the city was spread among the people. Every day one citizen, never the same, held the keys and the seals, and with him sixteen others formed a team that stayed for twenty-four hours in the **Round House**, "presiding" over the administration of Athens. Each month (ten in a year) fifty Councillors belonging to one tribe (there were ten tribes) acted as daily "Presidents", the order each year decided by lot. These five hundred Councillors, different people each year, formed the second, "People's Council", which was responsible for the ordinary running of business. There were still nine archons each year, and they, if approved by the people, entered the Areopagus Council for life at the end of the year. The **Generals**, the war-leaders, were elected annually, one from each tribe, to command the regiment which each tribe provided from its members in time of war, under the War Archon, but they might be re-elected several years running.

The Persians

From 630 until 553, **Persia** was the home of a man called **Zoroaster** in Latin, originally **Zarathustra**, who became the founder of a new religion, full of this-worldly optimism, ethical, and sure of the triumph of good over evil after a great dualistic struggle. This new religious spirit gave confidence to the Persians in a new enterprise. Beginning in 553, **king Cyrus** set out from Persia to conquer an empire. In 546 Cyrus overthrew the **Medes** and took control of **Babylonia** and the whole of the Middle East. In 536, he gave the exiled **Jewish** people in Babylon their freedom and helped them return to Jerusalem. There they rebuilt the **Temple**, which was rededicated in 516. Only later, around 445, did they rebuild the city walls. Almost two generations had lived and died away from the "Holy Land", yet they had forgotten nothing of their faith. This first **Exile** was a foretaste of the *Diaspora* that became total with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and has lasted until today.

In 529, Cyrus the Great was killed in battle, his son **Cambyses** succeeded him and conquered Egypt, where he set himself up as Pharaoh and, perhaps, went mad. He died in 522 and was followed by **Darius** who ruled until 485. Darius organized the administration of the Persian empire, centered at **Persepolis**, into twenty "satrapies" with governors, inspectors, taxes. His system lasted peacefully for some two hundred years. Darius mostly followed the new Zoroastrian religion. In 513, Darius set out to conquer Europe

along the Danube, but the Scythians living there were too strong, he was almost overwhelmed and withdrew. It was just at this time that Athens was discovering the strengths of true democracy thanks to Cleisthenes.

In 490, the Persians first attacked Greece, landing their army at **Marathon**, on the coast North-East of Athens. **Philippides** ran with the message, and thus established the Marathon. The Spartans were in Sparta, and the Athenian army had to face the Persians without them. The Persians were defeated in a great victory which gave new courage to Athens. Darius died in 486 and was followed by his son **Xerxes** (born 519) who was to be the "great enemy" of Greece.

In 483, Xerxes began to prepare the conquest of Greece, letting his plans be well-known. Most of the smaller cities accepted his rule in advance. In 480, the great Persian army (200,000 men?) crossed the Dardanelles over floating bridges (taking a week) and advanced towards Greece, while other forces came along the coast in a great Phoenician fleet. The Oracle at Delphi was not encouraging: "Either Sparta or a Spartan king must die."

Just when a great storm had destroyed many Persian ships, the Spartan king **Leonidas** with 300 of his Spartan elite confronted the Persians at the narrow pass of **Thermopylai**, blocking the way southward to Athens. But the Persians found another way round, and attacked from all sides. The Spartan king and all three hundred of his best men were killed in terrible fighting, in which two of Xerxes' brothers also died. Despite enormous odds the Spartans would neither surrender nor run away, so the Battle of Thermopylai has become the symbol of heroic courage, "the few against the many."

The Persians marched on to Athens, all the citizens of which had fled to the nearby island of Salamis. They captured the Acropolis, killed the soldiers defending it, and set it on fire.

Victory at Salamis

During the previous years, in the fierce struggles for influence that characterize Greek political life, one man had been rising in public view, **Themistokles**. In 483 Athens suddenly became very rich when a large vein of silver was discovered in the mines it owned. It was Themistokles, who foresaw already the Persian threat, who convinced the city to use this to build a new fleet of 100 war-ships in a new style, "**triremes**" with 200 men rowing 150 oars arranged in three tiers. When the Persians arrived, Athens had a total fleet of 200 triremes.

Although Xerxes announced the fall of Athens as a great victory, he had lost far too many ships through storms and attacks. Across the Isthmus of Corinth a huge Peloponnesian army blocked the way south. The Athenian fleet was waiting behind the island of **Salamis**, ready to attack the Persians if they tried to carry forces across to the South by sea. Then Themistokles sent a secret message to Xerxes, suggesting that the Greeks were not able to resist, that they were ready to run away, and that he himself was ready to support Xerxes. It was a trick and Xerxes fell for it.

Less than ten years later, the story of that day was told in the only Greek tragedy to deal with "modern" history, *The Persians*, written by a man who had been part of the Athenian army that day, **Aeschylus**, and watched by the people of Athens who had been waiting on the shores. It is told in the play to the mother of Xerxes by a messenger:

There came a Greek from the Athenian camp,
and said to your son Xerxes: come the night,
the Greeks would wait no longer, but embark
and sail in secret, scattering for their lives.
He, not suspecting the deceitfulness
of that Greek, nor the envy of high heaven,
at once gave orders to his admirals:
should the Greeks escape, their heads should fall;
-so said he, confident and glad at heart.
Little he knew what the gods had in store!

Then all night long the captains kept their crews
patrolling in the fairway. Night wore on,
and still no Greeks came out in secret flight;
but when at last the sun's bright chariot rose,
then we could hear them, singing; loud and strong
rang back the echo from the island rocks,

and with the sound came the first chill of fear.
Something was wrong. This was not flight; they sang
the deep toned hymn, "Apollo, Saving Lord",
that cheers the Hellene armies into battle.

Then trumpets over there set all on fire,
then the sea foamed as oars struck all together,
and swiftly, there they were! The right wing first
led on the ordered line, then all the rest
came on, came out, and now was to be heard
a mighty shouting: "On, sons of the Greeks!
Set free your country, set your children free,
your wives, the temples of your country's gods,
your fathers' tombs; now they are all at stake."
And from our side the Persian battle-cry
rang back the answer; and the time was come.

Then ship on ship rammed with her beak of bronze;
but first a Greek struck home; full on the quarter
she struck and shattered a Phoenician's planks;
then all along the line the fight was joined.

At first, the torrent of the Persian fleet
bore up; but when the press of shipping jammed
there in the narrows, none could help another,
but our ships rammed each other, fouled each other
and broke each other's oars. But those Greek ships,
skillfully handled, kept the outer station
ringing us round and striking in, till ships
turned turtle, and you could not see the water
for blood and wreckage; and the dead were strewn
thickly on the beaches, all the reefs;
and every ship in the fleet of Asia
in grim confusion fought to get away.

Meanwhile the enemy, as men gaff tunnies
or some great shoal of fish, with broken oars
and bits of wreckage hacked and killed; and shrieks
and cries filled the whole sea, till night came down.
(from: A. R. Burn, *The Pelican History of Greece* pp. 185-7)

The Greeks had defeated the Persians at sea, soon news of other victories came, and Xerxes sailed away, never to return. Greece, in particular Athens, was left to develop in its own way. The years between the Battle of Salamis in the autumn of 480 and the death of Alexander the Great in 323 in Babylon were decisive for the future of Western civilization.

Tell them in Lakedaimon, passer-by:
Carrying out their orders, here we lie.

That is the **epitaph** composed for the memorial of **Leonidas' Three Hundred** heroes who died and were buried at **Thermopylae** (the tomb mound is still there), a simple phrase designed to be cut in stone ("lapidary"), noble in spirit, a condensed "epigram" (meaning an "inscription"). Such **epigrams** were first developed at this time, they gradually became more complex, and separated from tombstones to become one of the basic features of lyric poetry.

When the Persians destroyed the temples on the **Acropolis**, there were already many **sculptures** there. In the rebuilding, these were thrown away, buried for centuries. They were "**archaic**" in style, stylized figures, not naturalistic, not idealizing, and most of the faces show a strange smile. The statues that were made in the period of the rebuilding are Classical, noble and, above all, serious. The twentieth century has rediscovered the charm of the archaic, but most people who visit the Louvre still admire the "Venus de Milo" as the model

of classical" beauty.

From 480 until the Fall of Athens

The great tragedian **Aeschylus** died in Sicily in 456. He had gone there partly to escape the quarrels that were spreading in Athens and across Greece. Athens had just completed the democratization of its government. He left his own epitaph, although it suggests that he did not think that his plays were so important, as they are not mentioned.

Here Aeschylus, son of Euphorion, bred in Athens, lies in Gela's cornland dead.

His fighting prowess Marathon could show and long-haired Medes (*Persians*), who had good cause to know.

In the lists of Greek figures at the start of this chapter, only **Pericles** is neither poet nor thinker, yet he was the central figure of Athen's greatest moments. Born into a wealthy family, in 472, when only 21, he was the *choregos* (sponsor) for Aeschylus' *The Persians*, which gained the first prize. It was designed to remind the divided Athenians of the great things they had done when they were united in 480. Pericles was the pupil and friend of **Anaxagoras** (the first philosopher to live in Athens), of **Phidias** the sculptor, and of **Sophocles**.

Pericles was from a "high" family, but he was a convinced democrat, and he played such an important role in Athens that this is called "The Age of Pericles", not by being a kind of dictator, but by being trusted by the people. When he spoke, people listened to him, then they voted in support of his proposals. The Assembly of Citizens (*ekklesia*) was the effective parliament and Pericles had the right to address them in just the same way as even the poorest Athenian. Only he spoke so well that he usually convinced them, for his only power lay in the power of his oratory and he was one of the great orators.

This century is one of the glories of human history, yet it is a tragic story. While rivalry and war divided the cities of Greece, Athens was rebuilding what the Persians had destroyed. At the same time, it had much trouble keeping the Spartans from attacking. In 445 the two great cities signed a 30-year peace treaty, under Pericles' urging. From 454 until his death in 429, the Athenians chose him as one of the Generals almost every year, in peace and in war, and in 447 he was put in charge of the rebuilding of the **Parthenon** (House of the Maiden, Athena) and the other great structures still standing (in ruins) on the **Acropolis**. When the people of Athens returned to the ruined city in 480, a young boy of fifteen had led the singing of the victory-song (Paean) in the celebrations. His name was **Sophocles**, and in 468 his tragedy was judged better than that of Aeschylus and won the first prize that year. **Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides** all wrote for the Athens of Pericles.

Herodotus of Halikarnassos came, too, after 480, and the "**History**" (the word before him only meant "researches") he wrote in prose to tell the story of the Athenian victory over Persia is the origin of all other histories. He wrote much of it in Italy.

Plutarch the Hellenistic historian, writing in the first century AD, wrote of **Pericles's age**: "Buildings which men thought would hardly be finished in several succeeding generations were all completed within the political prime of one man... Generally, facility and speed are not conducive to lasting impressiveness and the highest beauty; the time invested in hard work pays its dividends in the permanence of the product. And this is the more cause to marvel at the buildings of Pericles, that were made in so little time to last for so long."

It was all done, or almost all, in ten years. The great statue of the **Parthenos (Athene)** was dedicated at the Great Panathenaia of 438, some of the carvings were still being made. Many of them can now be seen in London, in the British Museum, where they are called the "**Elgin Marbles**", about which Keats wrote a sonnet. The Greeks are demanding their return to Athens.

In 431 the Peace broke down, and Athens was heading for the disaster of 404. During those years **Euripides** and **Aristophanes** wrote most of their surviving plays, **Sophocles** his last, some of the most beautiful buildings on the Acropolis were completed, **Plato** was born (428). The writings of the other great historian, **Thucydides**, make these the best-known years of the history of Athens. Most of Plato's **Dialogues** are shown as happening then too, for these are the years of **Socrates**, the culmination of the work of "pre-Socratic" philosophers and sophists.

The first part of the disaster was the **plague** that ravaged Persia, Egypt and Athens in 430-427, killing a quarter of the population; for some obscure reason, Pericles was blamed! Then his two sons died. In pity, he was re-elected as general, but he died in the autumn of 429 and was irreplaceable.

Thucydides writes his history of this time in a high, solemn style, stressing the terrible disaster that the war between the Greek cities was. In several cases the entire population of captured cities was massacred or sold as slaves. Several times, peace might have been possible, but without Pericles the chance

was missed.

By 415 a new leader had appeared in Athens, **Alkibiades**, whom Socrates tried to educate, and love. He was most handsome and totally vain. He figures in Plato's *Symposium*. He led a great Athenian army to Sicily on a campaign, then escaped to Sparta when he was called back to Athens, while his army attacked Syracuse. In 413 all the Athenian soldiers were taken prisoner, over 10,000 of them probably, of whom 7,000 were left to die in a "concentration camp" without shelter or real food.

In 411, democracy broke down and an authoritarian **oligarchy** took power for two years, after which they were so divided that democracy was easily restored. Alkibiades returned to Athens for a time. He was a good leader, but unfortunate, and later he withdrew again. Athens was by now almost completely isolated and although building and drama continued, the loss of life in the fighting also continued. The citizens were deeply divided about the responsibility for the military disasters, the system of justice was breaking down.

In 405 the Spartan leader **Lysander** captured 170 ships of the Athenian fleet and executed 4,000 Athenian prisoners. All who could took shelter inside the walls of Athens, and after a long siege, when people were dying in the streets, Athens surrendered to Sparta in 404.

Athens, luckily, had such a high reputation for its past deeds against the Persians, that Sparta dared not destroy it. Lysander brought back the **oligarchy** as a Council of Thirty led by **Kritias**, which began a reign of terror against the democratic leaders. The "Thirty Tyrants" needed a Spartan bodyguard, but at first there was no organized resistance. Then a small group of seventy Athenian men came back from Thebes and occupied a fortress 10 miles from Athens. They were able to defend it, and soon they were 700. They were able to attack and defeat the main group of Spartans in a surprise attack on their base. A few days later, 1000 strong now, although with weapons for only 600, they entered Piraeus (the port of Athens on the coast) and when Kritias marched down from Athens with 3,000 men, he was confronted and defeated by this small democratic army, supported by the stone-throwing population of Piraeus which had risen in revolt.

After a few months of confrontation, the democrats entered Athens, the oligarchic leaders were outlawed, and in 403 full democracy was restored in a spirit of forgiving and national harmony. But a new beginning was not so easy. Perhaps the insecurities provoked by so much loss help explain why, in 399, the city of Athens condemned to death the 70-year-old **Socrates**? Yet following him come **Plato and Aristotle**, the two Greek thinkers whose work remains fundamental even now.