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 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 Ionia, 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 origi-nated 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 infil-tration 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 Cnossos in Crete, excited much interest. A huge city-palace 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.

In the centuries following 2000 B.C., Crete was exporting very beau-tiful 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 every-where in the eastern Mediterranean. The city of Cnossos, being away from the sea, escaped although it had suffered from earthquakes in the past. Yet a few years later, around 1400 B.C., Cnossos 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, Cnossos was doing much trade with 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.

Mycenae was not a Cretan colony, but a Greek city-state 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 Cnossos 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. At this time, the first Greek settlers (colons) seem to, have gone to live in Sicily and Southern Italy.

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, Mycenean 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 them-selves 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 Greek 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 chal-lenge 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 re-ligious 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.

The Iliad

The name means "The Tale of Troy" (called Ilium/Ilion). Yet the main subject, Homer says, is

the “Wrath of Achilles”. The poem moves between the Achaian (Greek) army, led by Agamemnon, and the Trojan forces under Priam and his sons; it shows the sway of fortunes, and also the conflicts between the gods which influence events. But the greatness of the epic lies in its intense humanity. It is divided into 24 books. At the beginning, already many years have passed since the Greeks first arrived to attack Troy. The poem begins with an invocation that was later imitated by Milton:

Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus,
that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans.
Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades,
and many a hero did it yield a prey to dogs and vultures,
for so were the counsels of Jove fulfilled
from the day on which the son of Atreus, king of men,
and great Achilles, first fell out with one another.
And which of the gods was it that set them on to quarrel?
It was the son of Jove and Leto; for he was angry with the king
and sent a pestilence upon the host to plague the people,
because the son of Atreus had dishonoured Chryses his priest.

Books 1-8 tell how Agamemnon, obliged to return to her father a girl he has captured, forces the Greeks to let him take from Achilles a Trojan girl he has taken. Achilles is offended and withdraws from the fighting, spending the days sitting in his tent with his friend Patroklos. The fighting continues, with attacks from both sides, and at the centre of all stands the figure of Helen who comes down to see the battles from the walls of Troy, where the old men sit:

All grave old men, and soldiers they had been, but for age
Now left the wars; yet Councillors they were exceeding sage.
And as in well-grown woods, on trees, cold spiny grasshoppers
Sit chirping and send voices out that scarce can pierce our ears
For softness and their weak faint sounds, so talking on the tower

These seniors of the people sat, who, when they saw the power
Of beauty in the Queen ascend, even those cold-spirited peers,
Those wise and almost withered men found this heat in their years
That they were forced, tho whispering, to say: What man can blame
The Greeks and Trojans to endure, for so admired a Dame,
So many miseries, and so long?...
(From Chapman’s Homer iii. 159-69)

The Iliad describes many battles, and keeps including the varied responses of the gods who try to interfere in various ways. The theme of destiny is always present. One of the most touching scenes in the poem comes in Book 6 as Hector’s wife Andromache urges him not to go out to fight, convinced that he is doomed to die:

Hector hurried from the house when she had done speaking,
and went down the streets by the same way that he had come.
When he had gone through the city and had reached the Scaean gates
through which he would go out on to the plain, his wife came
running towards him, Andromache, daughter of great Eetion
who ruled in Thebes under the wooded slopes of Mt. Placus,
and was king of the Cilicians. His daughter had married Hector,
and came to meet him with a nurse who carried his little child
in her bosom- a mere babe. Hector’s darling son, and lovely as a star.
Hector smiled as he looked upon the boy, but he did not speak,
Andromache stood by him weeping and taking his hand in her own.
“Dear husband,” said she, “your valour will bring you to destruction;

think on your infant son, and on my hapless self
who ere long shall be your widow- for the Achaeans will set upon you
in a body and kill you. It would be better for me, should I lose you,
to lie dead and buried, for I shall have nothing left to comfort me
when you are gone, only sorrow. I have neither father nor mother now.
Achilles slew my father when he sacked Thebes.
He slew him, but did not for very shame despoil him;
when he had burned him in his wondrous armour, he raised a barrow
over his ashes and the mountain nymphs, daughters of Jove,
planted a grove of elms about his tomb. I had seven brothers
but on the same day they all went within the house of Hades.
Achilles killed them as they were with their sheep and cattle.
My mother—her who had been queen of all the land under Mt. Placus-
he brought hither with the spoil, and freed her for a great sum,
but the archer-queen Diana took her in the house of your father.
Hector, who to me are father, mother, brother, and dear husband-
have mercy upon me; stay here upon this wall;
make not your child fatherless, and your wife a widow; as for the host,
place them near the fig-tree, where the city can be best scaled,
and the wall is weakest. Thrice have the bravest of them come thither
and assailed it, under the two Ajaxes, Idomeneus, the sons of Atreus,
and the brave son of Tydeus, either of their own bidding,
or because some soothsayer had told them."
And Hector answered, "Wife, I too have thought upon all this,
but with what face should I look upon the Trojans, men or women,
if I shirked battle like a coward? I cannot do it: I know nothing
save to fight bravely in the forefront of the Trojan host and win renown
alike for my father and myself. I know that the day will surely come
when mighty Ilius shall be destroyed with Priam and his people,
but I grieve for none of these- not even for Hecuba, nor King Priam,
nor for my brothers who may fall in the dust before their foes-
for none of these do I grieve as for yourself when the day shall come
on which the Achaeans shall rob you for ever of your freedom,
and bear you weeping away. It may be that you will have to ply the loom
in Argos at the bidding of a mistress, or to fetch water, treated brutally
by some cruel task-master; then will one say who sees you weeping,
'She was wife to Hector, the bravest warrior among the Trojans
during the war before Ilius.' On this your tears will break forth anew
for him who would have put away the day of captivity from you.
May I lie dead under the barrow that is heaped over my body
ere I hear you cry as they carry you into bondage."
He stretched his arms towards his child, but the boy cried and
nestled in his nurse's bosom, scared at the sight of his father's armour,
and at the horse-hair plume that nodded fiercely from his helmet.
His father and mother laughed to see him, but Hector took the helmet
from his head and laid it all gleaming on the ground.
Then he took his darling child, kissed him, and dandled him in his arms,
praying over him the while to Jove and to all the gods.
"Jove," he cried, "grant that this my child may be even as myself,
chief among the Trojans; let him be not less excellent in strength,
and let him rule Ilius with his might. Then may one say of him
as he comes from battle, 'The son is far better than the father.'
May he bring back the blood-stained spoils of him

whom he has laid low, and let his mother's heart be glad.'"
With this he laid the child again in the arms of his wife,
who took him to her own soft bosom, smiling through her tears.
As her husband watched her his heart yearned towards her
and he caressed her fondly, saying, "My own wife,
do not take these things too bitterly to heart.
No one can hurry me down to Hades before my time,
but if a man's hour is come, be he brave or be he coward,
there is no escape for him when he has once been born.
Go, then, within the house, and busy yourself with your daily duties,
your loom, your distaff, and the ordering of your servants;
for war is man's matter, and mine above all others
of them that have been born in Ilius."
He took his plumed helmet from the ground, and his wife went back again
to her house, weeping bitterly and often looking back towards him.
When she reached her home she found her maidens within, and bade
them all join in her lament; so they mourned Hector in his own house
though he was yet alive, for they deemed that they should never see him
return safe from battle, and from the furious hands of the Achaeans.

By the end of Book 8 the Greeks are in great disorder, many have died, they have been forced back and Zeus too seems to be their enemy.

In Book 9, Agamemnon calls an Assembly and accepts to apologize to Achilles and make amends, if only he will come back into the fighting. Only he can save them. Achilles rejects the offer, insisting that Agamemnon should be humiliated still more. He is wrong, but he persists. As a result, when the fighting resumes next day, the Trojans beat back the Greeks as far as the place where their ships lie on the shore, wounding Agamemnon, Odysseus, and many others. Zeus, meanwhile, has fallen asleep in Hera's arms (Book 14) and the gods sympathetic to the Greeks give what help they can, but when Zeus awakes (Book 15) he intervenes to give the Trojans the upper hand.

In Book 16 Patroklos comes weeping to Achilles and begs to be allowed to go and help the Greeks. At that moment the Trojans set fire to one of the Greek ships, Achilles agrees and Patroklos leads out Achilles' Myrmidons, the Trojans are driven back. But Apollo disarms Patroklos and Hector kills him. Patroklos had been wearing Achilles own armour; this Hector strips off, and Trojans and Greeks fight for control of the body (Book 17).

Achilles hears news of his friend's death, and his mother, the sea-spirit Thetis, comes to comfort him. She tells him that if he kills Hector, he will also die soon after. He only demands new armour. Thetis goes to Olympus and asks Hephaestus to make it; meanwhile Achilles frightens back the Trojans merely by walking in their sight while Athena screams in support. While Achilles mourns his friend and washes his body, the shield is made in heaven, richly decorated and described at length. (Book 18)

First he shaped the shield so great and strong, adorning it all over
and binding it round with a gleaming circuit in three layers;
and the baldric was made of silver.
He made the shield in five thicknesses,
and with many a wonder did his cunning hand enrich it.
He wrought the earth, the heavens, and the sea;
the moon also at her full and the untiring sun,
with all the signs that glorify the face of heaven -
the Pleiades, the Hyads, huge Orion, and the Bear,
which men also call the Wain and which turns round ever in one place,
facing. Orion, and alone never dips into the stream of Oceanus.
He wrought also two cities, fair to see and busy with the hum of men.
In the one were weddings and wedding - feasts, and they were
going about the city with brides whom they were escorting by
torchlight from their chambers. Loud rose the cry of Hymen,

and the youths danced to the music of flute and lyre,
while the women stood each at her house door to see them.
Meanwhile the people were gathered in assembly,
for there was a quarrel, and two men were wrangling
about the blood-money for a man who had been killed,
the one saying before the people that he had paid damages in full,
and the other that he had not been paid. Each was trying
to make his own case good, and the people took sides,
each man backing the side that he had taken;
but the heralds kept them back, and the elders sat on their seats of stone
in a solemn circle, holding the staves
which the heralds had put into their hands.
Then they rose and each in his turn gave judgement,
and there were two talents laid down, to be given to him
whose judgement should be deemed the fairest.
About the other city there lay encamped two hosts in gleaming armour,
and they were divided whether to sack it, or to spare it
and accept the half of what it contained. But the men of the city
would not yet consent, and armed themselves for a surprise;
their wives and little children kept guard upon the walls,
and with them were the men who were past fighting through age;
but the others sallied forth with Mars and Pallas Minerva at their head-
both of them wrought in gold and clad in golden raiment,
great and fair with their armour as befitting gods,
while they that followed were smaller. When they reached the place
where they would lay their ambush, it was on a riverbed
to which live stock of all kinds would come from far and near to water;
here, then, they lay concealed, clad in full armour. Some way off
there were two scouts who were on the look-out for the coming
of sheep or cattle, which presently came, followed by two shepherds
who were playing on their pipes, and had not so much as a thought
of danger. When those who were in ambush saw this, they cut off
the flocks and herds and killed the shepherds.
Meanwhile the besiegers, when they heard much noise among the cattle
as they sat in council, sprang to their horses, and made with all speed towards them;
when they reached them they set battle in array
by the banks of the river, and the hosts aimed their bronze-shod spears
at one another. With them were Strife and Riot, and fell Fate
who was dragging three men after her, one with a fresh wound,
and the other unwounded, while the third was dead,
and she was dragging him along by his heel:
and her robe was bedrabbled in men's blood.
They went in and out with one another and fought
as though they were living people haling away one another's dead.
He wrought also a fair fallow field, large and thrice ploughed already.
Many men were working at the plough in it, turning their oxen
to and fro, furrow after furrow. Each time they turned
a man would come up to them and give them a cup of wine,
and they would go back to their furrows looking forward to the time
when they should again reach the headland.
The part that they had ploughed was dark behind them,
so that the field, though it was of gold, still looked
as if it were being ploughed- very curious to behold.
He wrought also a field of harvest corn,

and the reapers were reaping
with sharp sickles in their hands.
Swathe after swathe fell to the ground in a straight line behind them,
and the binders bound them in bands of twisted straw.
There were three binders, and behind them
there were boys who gathered the cut corn in armfuls and kept on
bringing them to be bound: among them all the owner of the land
stood by in silence and was glad.
The servants were getting a meal ready under an oak,
for they had sacrificed a great ox, and were busy cutting him up,
while the women were making a porridge of much white barley
for the labourers' dinner.
He wrought also a vineyard, golden and fair to see,
and the vines were loaded with grapes. The bunches overhead
were black, but the vines were trained on poles of silver.
He ran a ditch of dark metal all round it, and fenced it
with a fence of tin; there was only one path to it,
and by this the vintagers went when they would gather the vintage.
Youths and maidens all blithe and full of glee,
carried the luscious fruit in plaited baskets;
and with them there went a boy who made sweet music with his lyre,
and sang the Linus-song with his clear boyish voice.
He wrought also a herd of homed cattle.
He made the cows of gold and tin, and they lowed
as they came full speed out of the yards to go and feed
among the waving reeds that grow by the banks of the river.
Along with the cattle there went four shepherds, all of them in gold,
and their nine fleet dogs went with them. Two terrible lions
had fastened on a bellowing bull that was with the foremost cows,
and bellow as he might they haled him, while the dogs and men
gave chase: the lions tore through the bull's thick hide and were gorging
on his blood and bowels, but the herdsmen were afraid to do anything,
and only hounded on their dogs; the dogs dared not fasten on the lions
but stood by barking and keeping out of harm's way.
The god wrought also a pasture in a fair mountain dell, and a large
flock of sheep, with a homestead and huts, and sheltered sheepfolds.
Furthermore he wrought a green, like that which Daedalus once made
in Cnossus for lovely Ariadne. Here there danced youths
and maidens all would woo, with their hands on one another's wrists.
The maidens wore robes of light linen, and the youths well woven shirts
that were slightly oiled. The girls were crowned with garlands,
while the young men had daggers of gold that hung by silver baldrics;
sometimes they would dance deftly in a ring with merry twinkling feet,
as it were a potter sitting at his work and making trial of his wheel
to see whether it will run, and sometimes they would go all in line
with one another, and much people was gathered joyously
about the green. There was a bard also to sing to them and play his lyre,
while two tumblers went about performing in the midst of them
when the man struck up with his tune.
All round the outermost rim of the shield he set the mighty stream
of the river Oceanus.

Achilles now enters the combat, and all must run or die. Even the river he fills with the dead; when the river itself attacks him, it is over-come (Book 21). All the Trojans take refuge in the city, only Hector stands at the gates, waiting for Achilles. Priam and his mother beg him to come in, in vain. The

fight begins, at last the gods join in the fight, Hector is killed and Achilles drags his body round the walls of Troy, while his parents lament.

Achilles lays the body of Hector in the dust beside that of Patroklos, and they prepare the funeral of his friend. The Greeks prepare wood for the pyre, Achilles sacrifices animals and Trojan captives, and after Iris has summoned the winds, the pyre blazes all night. The next day there are funeral games (Book 23)

The last stage (Book 24) involves the body of Hector, preserved by the gods. Priam goes alone, by night, to Achilles to beg for his son's body. He enters the Greek camp unseen, thanks to the help of the god Hermes.

> The old man went straight into the house
> where Achilles, loved of the gods, was sitting.
> There he found him with his men seated at a distance from him:
> only two, the hero Automedon, and Alcimus of the race of Mars,
> were busy in attendance about his person,
> for he had but just done eating and drinking,
> and the table was still there.
> King Priam entered without their seeing him,
> and going right up to Achilles he clasped his knees
> and kissed the dread murderous hands
> that had slain so many of his sons.
>
> As when some cruel spite has befallen a man
> that he should have killed some one in his own country,
> and must fly to a great man's protection in a land of strangers,
> and all marvel who see him,
> even so did Achilles marvel as he beheld Priam.
> The others looked one to another and marvelled also,
> but Priam besought Achilles saying,
> "Think of your father, O Achilles like unto the gods,
> who is such even as I am, on the sad threshold of old age.
> It may be that those who dwell near him harass him,
> and there is none to keep war and ruin from him.
> Yet when he hears of you being still alive, he is glad,
> and his days are full of hope
> that he shall see his dear son come home to him from Troy;
> but I, wretched man that I am, had the bravest in all Troy for my sons,
> and there is not one of them left.
> I had fifty sons when the Achaeans came here;
> nineteen of them were from a single womb,
> and the others were borne to me by the women of my household.
> The greater part of them has fierce Mars laid low,
> and Hector, him who was alone left,
> him who was the guardian of the city and ourselves,
> him have you lately slain;
> therefore I am now come to the ships of the Achaeans
> to ransom his body from you with a great ransom.
> Fear, O Achilles, the wrath of heaven; think on your own father
> and have compassion upon me, who am the more pitiable,
> for I have steeled myself
> as no man yet has ever steeled himself before me,
> and have raised to my lips the hand of him who slew my son."

Thus spoke Priam,
and the heart of Achilles yearned as he thought of his own father.
He took the old man's hand and moved him gently away.
The two wept bitterly-
Priam, as he lay at Achilles' feet, weeping for Hector,
and Achilles now for his father and now for Patroclus,
till the house was filled with their lamentation.
But when Achilles was now sated with grief
and had unburdened the bitterness of his sorrow,
he left his seat and raised the old man by the hand,
in pity for his white hair and beard;
then he said, "Unhappy man, you have indeed been greatly daring;
how could you venture to come alone to the ships of the Achaeans,
and enter the presence of him who has slain so many of your brave sons?
You must have iron courage: sit now upon this seat,
and for all our grief we will hide our sorrows in our hearts,
for weeping will not avail us.
The immortals know no care,
yet the lot they spin for man is full of sorrow;
on the floor of Jove's palace there stand two urns,
the one filled with evil gifts, and the other with good ones.
He for whom Jove the lord of thunder mixes the gifts he sends,
will meet now with good and now with evil fortune;
but he to whom Jove sends none but evil gifts
will be pointed at by the finger of scorn,
the hand of famine will pursue him to the ends of the world,
and he will go up and down the face of the earth,
respected neither by gods nor men.
Even so did it befall Peleus;
the gods endowed him with all good things from his birth upwards,
for he reigned over the Myrmidons
excelling all men in prosperity and wealth,
and mortal though he was they gave him a goddess for his bride.
But even on him too did heaven send misfortune,
for there is no race of royal children born to him in his house,
save one son who is doomed to die all untimely;
nor may I take care of him now that he is growing old,
for I must stay here at Troy to be the bane of you and your children.

Achilles accepts Priam's ransom, has Hector's body washed and laid on the cart, then offers Priam hospitality.

As soon as they had had enough to eat and drink,
Priam, descendant of Dardanus,
marvelled at the strength and beauty of Achilles
for he was as a god to see, and Achilles marvelled at Priam
as he listened to him and looked upon his noble presence.
When they had gazed their fill Priam spoke first.
"And now, O king," he said, "take me to my couch
that we may lie down and enjoy the blessed boon of sleep.
Never once have my eyes been closed
from the day your hands took the life of my son;
I have grovelled without ceasing in the mire of my stable-yard,
making moan and brooding over my countless sorrows.
Now, moreover, I have eaten bread and drunk wine;

hitherto I have tasted nothing."
As he spoke Achilles told his men and the women-servants
to set beds in the room that was in the gatehouse,
and make them with good red rugs,
and spread coverlets on the top of them
with woollen cloaks for Priam and Idaeus to wear.
So the maids went out carrying a torch
and got the two beds ready in all haste.
Then Achilles said laughingly to Priam, "Dear sir, you shall lie outside,
lest some counsellor
of those who in due course keep coming to advise with me
should see you here in the darkness of the flying night,
and tell it to Agamemnon.
This might cause delay in the delivery of the body.
And now tell me and tell me true, for how many days
would you celebrate the funeral rites of noble Hector?
Tell me, that I may hold aloof from war and restrain the host."

And Priam answered,

"Since, then, you suffer me to bury my noble son with all due rites,
do thus, Achilles, and I shall be grateful.
You know how we are pent up within our city;
it is far for us to fetch wood from the mountain,
and the people live in fear.
Nine days, therefore, will we mourn Hector in my house;
on the tenth day we will bury him
and there shall be a public feast in his honour;
on the eleventh we will build a mound over his ashes,
and on the twelfth, if there be need, we will fight."
Achilles answered, "All, King Priam, shall be as you have said.
I will stay our fighting for as long a time as you have named."

For ten days the fighting is suspended while the Trojans prepare the pyre, cremate the body, and bury Hector's ashes. There the Iliad ends.

The Odyssey

The spirit of the Iliad is heroic, most of its action is violent fighting and slaughter. The Odyssey is quite different, full of marvels, journeys, and domestic household scenes. It is more "popular" than the Iliad, less "sublime". Like the Iliad, it begins in medias res (in the middle of things), but its structure is far more complex because of its use of "flash-back".

The beginning of the Odyssey is in Olympus, where the gods describe the situation of Ulysses/Odysseus kept prisoner for almost ten years after the fall of Troy on the island of the nymph Calypso while his wife and son wonder if he is alive or dead. Athena goes to his son, Telemachus, and orders him to go on a journey looking for news of his father. The house of Penelope in Ithaka is invaded by suitors wanting to become her husband. Telemachus sets out, and goes to visit Helen and Menelaus now reunited, to see if they have news. But nothing clear can be known.

Only in Book 5 does Hermes go to Calypso and order her to let Odysseus go. He makes a raft and sets out. He is almost shipwrecked on rocks but manages to land in an estuary. There he is found by the local princess Naussikaa, and brought to her home, the court of Alkinoos her father, who makes him welcome. During the evening he hears the minstrel sing a song of the wooden horse and the fall of Troy (Book 8) and he weeps.

Books 9-12 are the story of Odysseus's "Odyssey" from Troy to Calypso's island, told by him

to Alkinoos: they avoid the dangers of the land of the Lotus-eaters and reach the Island of the one-eyed Cyclops Polyphemus, son of Poseidon. They enter the cave in which he pens his sheep, not realizing what a monster he is. Finding them there, he makes them his prisoners and begins to eat them. Fortunately, Odysseus sees a way of escape. First he prepares a sharp stake of wood, then he makes Polyphemus drunk with wine. He tells Polyphemus that his name is 'Nobody'.

And now it was I drove the stake under a heap of ashes,
to bring it to a heat, and with my words
emboldened all my men, that none might flinch through fear.
Then when the olive stake, green though it was, was ready to take fire,
and through and through was all aglow, I snatched it from the fire,
while my men stood around
and Heaven inspired us with great courage.
Seizing the olive stake, sharp at the tip, they plunged it in his eye,
and I, perched up above, whirled it around.
As when a man bores shipbeams with a drill,
and those below keep it in motion with a strap held by the ends,
and steadily it runs; even so we seized the fire-pointed stake
and whirled it in his eye. Blood bubbled round the heated thing.
The vapor singed off all the lids around the eye, and even the brows,
as the ball burned and its roots crackled in the flame.
As when a smith dips a great axe or adze into cold water,
hissing loud, to temper it, for that is strength to steel,
so hissed his eye about the olive stake.
A hideous roar he raised; the rock resounded; we hurried off in terror.
He wrenched the stake from out his eye, all dabbled with the blood,
and flung it from his hands in frenzy.
Then he called loudly on the Cyclops who dwelt about him in the caves,
along the windy heights. They heard his cry, and ran from every side,
and standing by the cave they asked what ailed him:

"'What has come on you, Polyphemus,
that you scream so in the immortal night,
and keep us thus from sleeping?
Is a man driving off your Hocks in spite of you?
Is a man murdering you by craft or force?'

"Then in his turn from out the cave big Polyphemus answered:
'Friends, Nobody is murdering me by craft. Force there is none.'
"But answering him in winged words they said:
"If nobody harms you when you are left alone,
illness which comes from mighty Zeus you cannot fly.
But make your prayer to your father, lord Poseidon.'

Odysseus and his companions tie themselves under the bellies of the sheep.

"Soon as the early rosy-fingered dawn appeared,
the rams hastened to pasture,
but the ewes bleated unmilked about the pens,
for their udders were well nigh bursting.
Their master, racked with grievous pains,
felt over the backs of all the sheep as they stood up,
but foolishly did not notice how under the breasts of the woolly sheep
men had been fastened.
After we were come a little distance from the cave and from the yard,

first from beneath the ram I freed myself
and then set free my comrades.
So at quick pace we drove away those long-legged sheep, heavy with fat,
many times turning round, until we reached the ship.
A welcome sight we seemed to our dear friends,
as men escaped from death.
Yet for the others they began to weep and wail;
but this I did not suffer; by my frowns I checked their tears.
Instead, I bade them straightway toss
the many fleecy sheep into the ship, and sail away over the briny water.
Quickly they came, took places at the pins,
and sitting in order smote the foaming water with their oars.
But when I was as far away as one can call,
I shouted to the Cyclops in derision: (...)
I called aloud out of an angry heart:

‘ Cyclops, if ever mortal man asks you
the story of the ugly blinding of your eye,
say that Odysseus made you blind, the spoiler of cities,
Laertes’ son, whose home is Ithaca.’

“So I spoke, and with a groan he answered:
‘Ah, surely now the ancient oracles are come upon me!
Here once a prophet lived, a prophet brave and tall,
Telemus, son of Eurymus,
who by his prophecies obtained renown
and in prophetic works grew old among the Cyclops.
He told me it should come to pass in aftertime
that I should lose my sight by means of one Odysseus;
but I was always watching
for the coming of some tall and comely person, arrayed in mighty power;
and now a little miserable feeble creature has blinded me of my eye,
overcoming me with wine. nevertheless,
come here, Odysseus, and let me give the stranger’s gift,
and beg the famous Land-shaker to aid you on your way.
His son am I; he calls himself my father.
He, if he will, shall heal me; none else can,
whether among the blessed gods or mortal men.’

“So he spoke, and answering him said I:
‘Ah, would I might as surely strip you of life and being
and send you to the house of Hades,
as it is sure the Earth-shaker will never heal your eye!’

“So I spoke, whereat he prayed to lord Poseidon,
stretching his hands forth toward the starry sky:
‘Hear me, thou girder of the land, dark-haired Poseidon
If I am truly thine, and thou art called my father,
vouchsafe no coming home to this Odysseus,
spoiler of cities, Laertes’ son, whose home is Ithaca.
Yet if it be his lot to see his friends once more,
and reach his stately house and native land,
late let him come, in evil plight, with loss of all his crew,
on the vessel of a stranger,

and may he at his home find trouble.'

This curse, which inspires the enmity of Poseidon, is the explanation for all the disasters that befall Odysseus in his attempts to return home.

He continues with his tale, telling of the careless loss of the winds given by Aiolus, and the dangers of the witch Circe, able to turn men into swine, but who at last is forced to help Odysseus (Book 10); then comes the visit to the shades of the Underworld to con-sult the spirit of Tiresias on the way home. There he meets Agamemnon and hears of the way Clytemnestra and Aegisthus welcomed him on his return from Troy. He meets others of the dead, his mother too, from whom he learns that his father still lives (Book 11). Then they travel on past Scylla and Charybdis, past the Sirens whose song entices, and on to the island of the Sun whose cattle are sacred. There the sailors, hungry, kill the cattle. The ship is wrecked, all die, only Odysseus survives by his skill, and arrives at the island of Calypso.

Alkinoos equips him with a ship and the second half of the epic begins the story of the "Return of the Warrior", his arrival in Ithaka disguised with divine help (Book 13), finding hospitality in the home of the swineherd Eumaeus to whom he tells a false story of his iden-tity. Telemachus now (Book 14) returns from his journey, suspicious of the suitors who have laid a trap, while Odysseus makes the swine-herd talk about his parents and the past memories of himself (Book 15).

In Book 16 Telemachus comes to Eumaeus' hut and Odysseus reveals his identity to him. Telemachus, then Odysseus, set out for the palace, Odysseus again disguised as a beggar. As Odysseus enters the court-yard, the old dog Argos recognizes his master:

> As they were thus talking, a dog that had been lying asleep
> raised his head and pricked up his ears.
> This was Argos, whom Ulysses had bred before setting out for Troy,
> but he had never had any work out of him.
> In the old days he used to be taken out by the young men
> when they went hunting wild goats, or deer, or hares,
> but now that his master was gone he was lying neglected
> on the heaps of mule and cow dung that lay in front of the stable doors
> till the men should come and draw it away to manure the great close;
> and he was full of fleas.
> As soon as he saw Ulysses standing there,
> he dropped his ears and wagged his tail,
> but he could not get close up to his master.
> When Ulysses saw the dog on the other side of the yard,
> he dashed a tear from his eyes without Eumaeus seeing it, and said:
> "Eumaeus, what a noble hound that is over yonder on the manure heap:
> his build is splendid; is he as fine a fellow as he looks,
> or is he only one of those dogs that come begging about a table,
> and are kept merely for show?"
> "This hound," answered Eumaeus, "belonged to him
> who has died in a far country.
> If he were what he was when Ulysses left for Troy,
> he would soon show you what he could do.
> There was not a wild beast in the forest
> that could get away from him when he was once on its tracks.
> But now he has fallen on evil times, for his master is dead and gone,
> and the women take no care of him. . ."
> As he spoke he went inside the buildings to the cloister
> where the suitors were,
> but Argos died as soon as he had recognized his master.
> (From Book 17).

The suitors welcome the old man with mockery, until he almost kills one. The tone now changes

to foreboding as Odysseus observes them and plans his revenge (Book 18), while Penelope comes down into the hall and shows her faithfulness by her attitude. Later that evening, Penelope returns to the hall and talks with the old man, telling him of her ploy with the weaving done by day, undone by night (Book 19). Odysseus tells her a tale of an encounter with Odysseus. Penelope is deeply moved. He tells her that Odysseus will soon be back. His former nurse, Eurycleia, comes to wash his feet and recognizes the scar of an old wound on his leg; he forces her to keep the secret. Penelope tells him her plan to test the suitors with his bow and arrows.

The responses of people to the wretched-looking Odysseus show their moral character; bad people show no human pity for the unfortunate. The scenes of Book 20 stress this theme of judgement, of the difference between the cruel and the noble. In Book 21, Penelope fetches Odysseus' great bow, while he makes himself known to Eumaeus and the cowman Philoetius. The suitors try in vain to string the great bow, but get very angry when Odysseus asks to try too. Telemachus sends Penelope away, as the tension rises. Once all the women are away, and the doors bolted, Odysseus calmly strings the bow and shoots an arrow through the upright axes.

The slaughter of Book 22 comes as a shock; it is a great conflict, not at all one-sided, although Athena's help is considerable. When all the suitors are dead, the women servants who have slept with them have to clear up the mess before being executed. The house has been purified. Meanwhile, Penelope has slept. In Book 23 Eurycleia wakes her and announces Odysseus' return. Penelope is too prudent to believe her tale at once. She goes down to the hall and sits in silence opposite Odysseus, examining him carefully. He arranges for music so that the families of the dead men will not suspect something:

The house re-echoed with the sound of men and women dancing, and the people outside said, "I suppose the queen is getting married at last. She ought to be ashamed of herself for not continuing to protect her husband's property until he comes home." This was what they said, but they did not know what it was that had been happening.

The upper servant Eurynome washed and anointed Ulysses in his own house and gave him a shirt and cloak, while Minerva made him look taller and stronger than before; she also made the hair grow thick on the top of his head, and flow down in curls like hyacinth blossoms; she glorified him about the head and shoulders just as a skilful workman who has studied art of all kinds under Vulcan or Minerva- and his work is full of beauty- enriches a piece of silver plate by gilding it. He came from the bath looking like one of the immortals, and sat down opposite his wife on the seat he had left.

"My dear," said he, "heaven has endowed you with a heart more unyielding than woman ever yet had. No other woman could bear to keep away from her husband when he had come back to her after twenty years of absence, and after having gone through so much. But come, nurse, get a bed ready for me; I will sleep alone, for this woman has a heart as hard as iron."

"My dear," answered Penelope, "I have no wish to set myself up, nor to depreciate you; but I am not struck by your appearance, for I very well remember what kind of a man you were when you set sail from Ithaca. Nevertheless, Euryclea, take his bed outside the bed chamber that he himself built. Bring the bed outside this room, and put bedding upon it with fleeces, good coverlets, and blankets."

She said this to try him, but Ulysses was very angry and said, "Wife, I am much displeased at what you have just been saying. Who has been taking my bed from the place in which I left it? He must have found it a hard task, no matter how skilled a workman he was, unless some god came and helped him to shift it. There is no man living, however strong and in his prime, who could move it from its place, for it is a marvellous curiosity which I made with my very own hands.

There was a young olive growing within the precincts of the house, in full vigour, and about as thick as a bearing-post. I built my room round this with strong walls of stone and a roof to cover them, and I made the doors strong and well-fitting. Then I cut off the top boughs of the olive tree and left the stump standing. This I dressed roughly from the root upwards and then worked with carpenter's tools well and skilfully, straightening my work by drawing a line on the wood, and making it into a bed-prop. I then bored a hole down the middle, and made it the centre-post of my bed, at which I worked till I

had finished it, inlaying it with gold and silver; after this I stretched a hide of crimson leather from one side of it to the other. So you see I know all about it, and I desire to learn whether it is still there, or whether any one has been removing it by cutting down the olive tree at its roots."

When she heard the sure proofs Ulysses now gave her, she fairly broke down. She flew weeping to his side, flung her arms about his neck, and kissed him. "Do not be angry with me Ulysses," she cried, "you, who are the wisest of mankind. We have suffered, both of us. Heaven has denied us the happiness of spending our youth, and of growing old, together; do not then be aggrieved or take it amiss that I did not embrace you thus as soon as I saw you. I have been shuddering all the time through fear that someone might come here and deceive me with a lying story; for there are many very wicked people going about. Jove's daughter Helen would never have yielded herself to a man from a foreign country, if she had known that the sons of Achaeans would come after her and bring her back. Heaven put it in her heart to do wrong, and she gave no thought to that sin, which has been the source of all our sorrows. Now, however, that you have convinced me by showing that you know all about our bed (which no human being has ever seen but you and I and a single maid servant, the daughter of Actor, who was given me by my father on my marriage, and who keeps the doors of our room) hard of belief though I have been I can mistrust no longer."

Then Ulysses in his turn melted, and wept as he clasped his dear and faithful wife to his bosom. As the sight of land is welcome to men who are swimming towards the shore, when Neptune has wrecked their ship with the fury of his winds and waves- a few alone reach the land, and these, covered with brine, are thankful when they find themselves on firm ground and out of danger- even so was her husband welcome to her as she looked upon him, and she could not tear her two fair arms from about his neck. Indeed they would have gone on indulging their sorrow till rosy-fingered morn appeared, had not Minerva determined otherwise, and held night back in the far west, while she would not suffer Dawn to leave Oceanus, nor to yoke the two steeds Lampus and Phaethon that bear her onward to break the day upon mankind.

Book 24 (which many think was not written by Homer, but it is necessary to end the story) begins with the arrival of the souls of the suitors in the Underworld, where they are welcomed by that of Agamemnon, stressing the contrast between his return and that of Odysseus. Odysseus sets out to visit his father, Laertes, and finds him working in the orchard, dressed in rags. He pretends not to know who he is, and again tells of having met Odysseus some years before. Laertes shows his sorrow, and Odysseus identifies himself, proving his identity by remembering details from his childhood. Meanwhile the Assembly has met to discuss the deaths. The truth is told but the majority demand revenge and march out. At the farmhouse, the family and friends arm themselves with courage. Fighting begins, but is stopped by Athena. Zeus too inter-venes to restore peace under the rule of Odysseus.

Hesiod

At about the same time as Homer, if he lived around 720-700, an-other 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 prob-ably not write, he shows oral features in his Theogony and his Works and Days. The former tells the theological history of the cosmos, intro-ducing 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.

From the Theogony

Hail, daughters of Zeus! Give me sweet song,
To celebrate the holy race of gods
who live forever, sons of starry Heaven
and Earth, and gloomy Night, and salty Sea.
Tell how the gods and earth arose at first,
and rivers and the boundless swollen sea
and shining stars, and the broad heaven above,
and how the gods divided up their wealth
and how they shared their honours, how they first
captured Olympus with its many folds.
Tell me these things, Olympian Muses, tell
from the beginning, which first came to be?

Chaos was first of all, but next appeared
broad-bosomed Earth, sure standing-place for all
the gods who live on snowy Olympus' peak,
and misty Tartarus, in a recess
of broad-pathed earth, and Love, most beautiful
of all the deathless gods. He makes men weak,
he overpowers the clever mind, and tames
the spirit in the breasts of men and gods.
From Chaos came black Night and Erebos.
And Earth bore starry Heaven, first, to be
an equal to herself, to cover her
all over, and to be a resting-place,
always secure, for the blessed gods.
Then she brought forth long hills, the lovely homes
of goddesses, the Nymphs who live among
the mountain-clefts. Then, without pleasant love,
she bore the barren sea with its swollen waves...
Night bore frightful Doom and the black Horror,
and Death, and Sleep, and the whole tribe of Dreams.
Again, though she slept with none of the gods,
dark Night gave birth to Blame and sad Distress,
and the Hesperides, who, out beyond
the famous stream of Oceanus, tend
the lovely golden apples, and their trees.
She bore the Destinies and ruthless Fates,
goddesses who track down the sins of men
and gods, and never cease from awful rage
until they give the sinner punishment.
Then deadly Night gave birth to Nemesis,
that pain to gods and men, and then she bore
Deceit and Love, sad Age, and strong-willed Strife.
And hateful Strife gave birth to wretched Work,
Forgetfulness, and Famine, tearful Pains,
Battles and Fights, Murders, Killings of men,
Quarrels and Lies and Stories and Disputes,
and Lawlessness and Ruin, both allied...

Pontus' firstborn child was Nereus,
the honest one, the truthful. The old man
is called this name because he never errs,
and he is gentle and remembers Right,

and knows the arts of Mercy and the Law.

(Translated by Dorothea Wender)

The Greeks had no concept of a Creator. Their gods are born as the result of primeval natural forces once the fundamental duo of Sky and Earth has emerged from formless Chaos.

The Works and Days is one of the most remarkable works of Greek literature. It is no heroic tale, or transmission of myths. Hesiod, as a farmer who has to work hard, tries to understand the mixture of joy and pain in life. He is addressing his brother with whom he is in conflict, and this provides a framework that is essentially personal. He sees that Strife may be constructive or destructive, that life is marked by justice and injustice, but Hesiod concludes that while suffering is at times inevitable, Hope remained in Pandora's box, and there are real possibilities of human happiness.

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 book is written.

When the Greeks took the 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.

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, partic-ularly 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 dis-tance 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 (= aristo-cracy), 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 Demo-cracy 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 in-volving sacrifices etc. in the name of the city.

Even in democratic Athens, there was a person called "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 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 auto-cratic 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 sur-render of Athens in 404, weakened Greece and in the end led to its decline.

Athens

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 agri-cultural 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 reor-ganized 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 strug-gle, 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.

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 demo-cracy, electing the first two consuls of the Roman Republic.

Cleisthenes created new divisions in Athenian society, no longer cor-responding 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 reli-gion, 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, Cyrus set out from Persia to conquer an empire. In 547, he defeated the last king of Lydia (now Turkey), Croesus, who had asked the Delphic Oracle for advice and received the answer "If Croesus crosses the river Halys, he will destroy a mighty empire". Croesus, forgetting that his own empire was "mighty", duly crossed the river! 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 suc-ceeded 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.

He 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.

Herodotos 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: "Build-ings 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 impressive-ness 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 con-tinued, 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 sur-rendered 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 body-guard, 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.