

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

# ANCIENT GREEK LITERATURE

## **Course Description**

This course provides a close look at ancient Greek literature, including epics, philosophy, and poetry.

## **About the Professor**

Frederic Will, Ph.D. is a widely published professor of comparative literature who has been a Fulbright Scholar in Greece, Tunisia, and Ivory Coast. He is the founding editor of *Micromegas*, a journal of poetry in translation, and was served as administrator and faculty member of Dartmouth, University of Massachusetts, and University of Iowa.

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## Contents

*Week 1 Introduction* The energy of the Ancient Greek Tradition, in the Arts, Literature, Political Practice, remains with us in every part of our lives.

### UNIT ONE THE EPIC IMAGINATION

*Week 2 Homer, The Iliad.* The earliest work of Greek literature, and arguably the most influential. Based on centuries old inherited tales, of the Taking of the City of Troy in Asia Minor, this epic brings together individuals and fate with a force that still echoes through Western history.

*Week 3 Homer, The Odyssey.* This 'companion piece' to the *Iliad* moves the heroic Sack of Troy over into the homeward returns of the Greek veterans, and directs particular attention to Odysseus, whose path back to his home island and wife is marked by every kind of exotic obstacle.

*Week 4 Hesiod, Works and Days and Theogony.* Still in the epic tradition, employing the same meter and rhetorical conventions as Homer, Hesiod writes from a rustic farmer's standpoint, rehearsing the genealogy of the gods, and addressing the hopes and concerns of the rural world..

*Week 5 Pindar, The Odes.* With Pindar's epic spirit we move into the world of the Ode, a paean of praise—in Pindar's case—for victors in the supreme trials of athletic prowess—such trials as the Olympic games. Manly discipline and prowess set the epic tone of these complex poems of 'heroes.'

### UNIT TWO THE PHILOSOPHIC IMAGINATION

*Week 6 Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes.* The epic imagination privileged comprehensive poetic visions of the order of the cosmos and of the passions displayed by the noble figures of adventure and folk thought. The philosophic imagination took a different path into the large scale description of what the world is. The three Milesian 'philosophers,' working from Asia Minor in the sixth century, created kinds of mythology of the chief elements of the physical world: *air, fire, water.*

*Week 7 Socrates.* With Socrates, the pupil of Plato, we move to the end of the fifth century B.C. and just enter the fourth, a new stage of Greek self-awareness. What does Socrates see, as he reviews his own process of thought, and the history of his culture? How does he surpass the thinking of the Milesians—or does he?

*Week 8 Plato, The Dialogues.* In a series of intricate but humane discussions Plato raises and adopts a variety of attitudes toward what will be classical questions of subsequent philosophy. How do we know? What is the good? Who should lead?

### UNIT THREE THE LYRIC IMAGINATION

*Week 9 The Personal Lyric. Archilochos and Sappho.* We see here individualized verbal forms and a new development of 'personality' appropriate for a democratic society, and for the emergence of 'modern' social forms.

*Week 10 Solon and Herondas.* We sample an early (sixth century B.C.) and a late (late fourth century B.C.) version of Greek poetry as social commentary.

#### UNIT FOUR THE DRAMATIC IMAGINATION

*Week 11 Aeschylus.* In seven extant dramas, produced in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Aeschylus takes us from the mythical imagination into mimetic action aimed to engage the newly self-directing democracy of Athenian citizens.

*Week 12 Sophocles.* During a long creative life, which spanned the center of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Sophocles established brilliant dramas of perplexing tragic force, and summed up his classical moment.

*Week 13 Euripides.* Contemporary with Sophocles, Euripides was a prolific dramatist of idea-issues, new and compelling trends in Athenian culture: *the needs and goals of women, the place of the stranger in society, traditional versus modern morality.*

*Week 14 Aristophanes.* Contemporary with Sophocles, Aristophanes turns a satirist's dramatic eye on the culture around him, including its great dramatic icons.

#### UNIT FIVE THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

*Week 15 Herodotus, The Histories.* Contemporary with the great figures shaping the Athenian Fifth Century 'miracle,' Herodotus wrote the first significant history of Greece and recorded his travels both in Greece and in other parts of the Eastern Mediterranean.

*Week 16 Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War.* A drier, more analytical, more philosophical historian than Herodotus, Thucydides probes the causes and resolutions that make of the Peloponnesian War, at the end of the fifth century, a model of human folly and brutality.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### **Unit Essays**

#### Unit I The Epic Imagination

Please deal in this paper with some aspects of the epic tradition, as we have been encountering it. Feel free to create your own approach, arguing for a personal view of certain texts, but try to support your argument with as much relevant research as possible. Citations, while not mandatory, can do a lot to pin down an argument.

Is it right to consider Pindar part of the epic tradition? Is his perspective congruent with those of Homer and Hesiod?

Do the Iliad and the Odyssey seem to spring from the same poet? We have treated the two epics as offspring of a single Homer; were we right to do that?

What makes the hexameter an appropriate line for the Greek epic? How do you compare it, as a vehicle of expression, with the iambic pentameter line, which is the classic vehicle of extended English language poetry?

#### Unit II The Philosophic Imagination

Are you convinced that early epic and early philosophy spring from the same root? Or do you see the epic and the philosophic imaginations as from the beginning seriously different?

Do you see a connection between Socrates' thought and that of the Pre Socratics? What is it?

#### Unit III The Lyric imagination

To what extent do the early Greek lyric, and the political poetry of Solon and Herondas, give insights into the personalities of their creators?

#### Unit IV The Dramatic Imagination

The chorus is arguably the heart of the Greek drama, although we have given most of our attention to plot and content. What was the overriding importance of the chorus? What crucial roles did it play in shaping a drama?

To call a play a tragedy is a strong statement. Do you find Greek tragedies 'tragic'? Or are they—or some of them—exalting and uplifting?

#### Unit V The Historical Imagination

Despite the sharp differences, between the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides, do you think they converge in their use of short stories and vignettes to move the timeline along?

**Final Essay** (Please choose one question from the selection below for your final essay)

Are you happy with the analysis of Greek literature in terms of types of imagination? Do you see a genuine connection among the five types of imagination we isolated?

Aristotle commented that poetry is more philosophical than history, because poetry is concerned with what might have been rather than with what was. Was he right?

## **Introduction**

**Current vigor of ancient Greek literature.** Ancient Greek literature remains a vigorous element in contemporary culture; just look on the shelves of any University research library, and you will find dozens of up to the moment debates concerning the nature and present relevance of that body of work. Archeology, cutting edge literary critical debate, philosophy both technical and popular, social and political philosophy: all of these regions of contemporary inquiry contextualize themselves in reference to the 'Hellenic experience.' Greek literature, in the broad sense of the term, is the bearer of pulsing cultural energy. Add to that scholarly situation the regular revival of Greek plays on the Broadway stage, the heavy representation of translated Greek literature in college campus curricula, and the world wide reputation of contemporary Greek writers like Nikos Kazantzakis, whose *Odyssey* rises at best to the level of Homer, Angelos Sikelianos, one of the great European modernist poets, or George Seferis (Nobel Prize for Literature, 1963) and Odysseus Elytis (Nobel Prize for Literature, 1979); although those post-classical Greek authors are not included in the present syllabus, they will be taken up in another Humanities University course, on Balkan literature.

**Purpose of present syllabus.** The present syllabus aims to provide a glimpse of some of the great achievements of the ancient Greek—especially the Athenian—literary achievement. The arrangement of study here is by genre of imagination: *epic, philosophy, lyric, drama, and history* were each the product of a distinctive kind of imagination. By adopting this perspective we single out determining facets of the Hellenic literary mind: the vastness of historical sweep (*epic*); the power of analytic self-awareness (*philosophy*); the inclusion of feeling in self-referential language (*poetry*); the force of imitated 'persons in action' (drama); the organization of group memory (*history*). We will make appropriate efforts, as we go along, to embed these generic discussions in their chronological setting, but we will not primarily be concerned with 'filling in the time line.'

**Readings and assignments.** The readings for each week of the course will be in the most current of the many available English translations of the great texts noted below; or, in a few cases, in suitable online versions of the works. (The readings will be listed with each week's assignment.) The expectation, for student input, is suggested by the three papers scheduled for Weeks Five, Ten, and Sixteen. *Suggested topics for these papers are listed at the end of the syllabus material for Weeks Five, Ten, and Sixteen. You should consult these topic suggestions at the outset of the class.* The instructor will welcome imaginative ways to address this three part written assignment. Diary entries could play a role in meeting the assignment. So could a build up into a final 5000 word paper, which embraces all three assignments together. *Collateral readings will be indicated in the bibliography at the end of the syllabus.*

### *Reading*

For this first week we will read Mary Beard, *Classics, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 1995). This brief book, 136 pages, will deal with the whole field of classical antiquity, and our relation to it. I suggest you read it through in one sitting.

Two other texts, apart from the weekly readings in translations of Greek literature, will underly our whole course. If possible, you should try to buy the following: *The Norton Book of Classical Literature*, ed. Knox (New York, 1993) and *Ancient Greece: From Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times*, by Thomas Martin (New Haven, 2000). The Norton book will give you a broad sampling (550 pages) of Greek literature in as up-to-date as possible translation, an outstanding introduction to Classical Literature as a whole, and fine introductions to

individual Greek authors. Martin's brief history of Ancient Greece should give you a contemporary overview, replete with current views in archeology and linguistics as well as in political/social history. I suggest you become familiar with both these texts as early as possible in your reading.

*Discussion*

As you read Beard, please review in your mind the place that the Classical Greek Tradition plays in your world today. Consider the power that tradition actually wields in our language, our habits of thought, our literary forms, our architectural styles. Try to survey that contribution, and to think ahead to what kind of future you see for the Classical Tradition in our own increasingly technical age.



## Homer, The Iliad

**Homer and his tradition.** The Greek epic imagination launches with the genius of Homer. We are still not certain of the identity of this creator, or whether he composed in writing or orally, but we know that in the late eighth century B.C. he wrote down some version of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the two greatest milestones in Greek literature—and in fact in Greek culture. It was not, of course, that this creation emerged out of the blue, for in fact Archaic Greek culture had by 700 B.C. been developing for at least a millennium on the Greek mainland, and there had long been a rich oral epic tradition in northern areas of what would later become Greece. And that is only a short sighted view of the epic tradition that was 'behind' Homer. Behind the Greek epic tradition was a mighty volume of Ancient Near Eastern epic texts, many of them lost in the sands of the Middle East, which included such masterworks as the Babylonian Creation Story (*Enuma Elish*) or *Gilgamesh*, a literary exploration of fundamental human themes—immortality, lust, personal integrity-- composed one millennium before Homer's work. That Mesopotamian background clearly empowered the epic imagination which grew from the various culture creative people who occupied the Ancient Near East. *Language growth* was another factor in making the Greek epic imagination effective. The great ancient epics were originally created by massive feats of oral memory, but by the time of the Homeric 'recension,' putting these texts together in the late eighth century, an elegant and efficient alphabetic system, like the Greek, was available and had been found invaluable for communication. The development of that code system, out of an ancient history leading through cuneiform and hieroglyphic traditions, eventually into a Phoenician waystage, required millennia of experiment and ingenuity. Even a native genius like Homer was dependent on the tireless creative efforts of his language making predecessors.

**The narrative of the Iliad.** We open with arguably the greatest of Homer's works, the *Iliad*, or the epic about the 'Fall of Troy.' The historic 'Fall'—traditionally located by the Greeks as from the twelfth cent. B.C.—brought together a set of local Greek power lords and retainers, whose interest was in the wealth and shipping control of Troy itself, strategically located on the shores of the Bosphorus. A myth, which dominates Homer's account of the Greek commercial/military venture, holds that Alexander, the son of the King of Troy, stole Helen, the glamorous wife of the Greek warlord Menelaus, and carried her off to Troy as his love-toy. The story of the subsequent expedition against Troy, and the defeat of the city and its rulers, would by this myth be a byproduct of commercial adventure; only by Homer's vision transmuted into a powerful story of action, military courage and brutality, sexual passion, and ultimately regions of self-sacrifice that touch the lives of all of us. The *Iliad* can be read as pure absorbing fiction in dactylic hexameters, or as an account of the historical movement of peoples in the mid second millennium, an account referring back to an event six to eight hundred years earlier than Homer's own time.

**The hexameter.** The final preliminary note should concern the dactylic hexameter. A long epic line, typically broken in two parts, was the vehicle of Homer's creation and of the professional bards who recited epic tales as entertainment throughout Greek antiquity. The hexameter itself is an easily memorizable line, with infinite subtlety for tone and implication. We are to imagine the epic typically performed to the strumming of the lyre, and by a highly experienced professional, who measured his success by the muscular acclaim of his all male upper class warrior audiences. Imagine it, veteran warriors quaffing their Samnian wine as they delight in sung poetry of great finesse!

*Reading*

Taken from the internet on 12 24 12 , the following mini-blog indicates the currency of the continuing effort to translate Homer into living English.

[www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2011/11/englishing-the-iliad.htm](http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2011/11/englishing-the-iliad.htm)

There is a brilliant legacy of Homer translations in English, dating back to Chapman in the Renaissance, and, two centuries later, Alexander Pope, whose superb *Iliad* bristles with the elegances of his own time's classically educated language. Among the fine contemporary English translations of the *Iliad* known to me, the best are those of: Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1951), Robert Fitzgerald (New York, 1974), and Robert Fagles (New York, 1990). These translations are all made by accomplished Greek scholars, and fine poets. Please outfit yourself with one of these translations, and read the whole *Iliad* this week!

### *Discussion*

The central question raised by the epic is this: what leads Achilles to return the body to Hector to Priam at the end of the epic? Is there here a breakthrough into compassion and pity? (If so, does this seem a unique expression of pity for the *Iliad*? Or are there other examples of pity in the poem?) Or if not into pity, is there here at the epic's end a softening in the heart of a brilliant, doomed, and hypersensitive hero, who is part divine? We can use touchstones like this question to evaluate the kind of moral achievement valued by the ancient Greeks. When you get to the tragic hero, and his/her ultimate encounter with death and finitude, will wisdom in a wide sense take over? What is wisdom for the ancient Greek mind? Is it anything like 'religious understanding,' as we might term it?

## **Homer *The Odyssey***

**Narrative of the *Odyssey*.** Among the Greek warriors at Troy, who came from different aristocratic walled centers on the Greek mainland, came many leaders who felt themselves aggrieved by the 'rape of Helen,' or the 'rape of their commercial vigor,' however the loss is described. Among these independent warriors was Odysseus, lord of the manor on the island of Ithaca. As a supporter of Agamemnon, the overall head of the Greek expedition, Odysseus was a team player, until Troy fell; but after that Fall—once again the date given by the Greeks to the event was the twelfth century B.C., the Bronze Age—the Greek warriors dispersed, heading back toward their homeland and local communities. In the accounts of this return Homer collects memories lodged deep in the Greek folk memory, recollections of periods of naval adventure, seafaring trade, and commercial rivalry; Homer blends these memories into a coherent whole around the half-'real' half-fictive adventures of a warrior whose courage, sense of irony, and passionate life-love have made him for subsequent world literature a brilliant symbol. You will see, as you follow the narrative of *The Odyssey*, that Homer exposes this fictive personage—whose name means 'the angry one'—to trials which bring out his character, and with it the salient value traits of the Bronze Age Greek world, the world known to us through archeological discovery and the vast remains of those Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations, which were the formative social/political units in Greece, during the perhaps six hundred years between the Trojan War and the time of the writing down of the Homeric epics in the eighth century B.C.

**The human content of the *Odyssey*.** Without spoiling the text by retelling stories here, we may draw your attention to a kind of dimension, prevalent in the *Odyssey*—also in the *Iliad*—which is behind the universal greatness of this text. Odysseus is at one point a guest in the kingdom of the Phaeacians, an idyllic culture given to dance and music and the gentle life; he has just survived a harrowing battle with the waves at sea. Seated next to the King, at a vast board of victuals, Odysseus is delighted to hear the bard—for there was always musical entertainment at grandee feasts—recount the details of a hero's wandering, a hero who turns out, as the song proceeds, to be Odysseus himself. The reader/hearer of the epic thrills to the dimensionality of the text, where Homer winks at us across the character of Odysseus who is winking at us across the irony of listening in delighted silence to a validating tale of himself at sea, a tale which rescues the hero from all the anonymity of endurance on the fishy brine.

**The hexameter as core of the poem.** Once again the hexameter is the unsung hero of the epic, the base against which the music of the tale is told. Since we are in this course reading great literature in translation, and thus perforce responding repeatedly to the 'great vision and theme,' it is appropriate also to remind ourselves of the precise product we are passing across. The hexameter is a line of six cola—six metrical units—of which the basic foot is long/short/short, where length refers to length of time required to produce the syllable in question. There is great variation in the blend of cola lengths, with the result that the tale sung in dactyls is flexible and lengthy. Among the devices chosen to hold the line under control are the cesura which divides the line in two, and continually falls at a different place, and the insertion of formulaic material, which is a hallmark of the Greek epic, and provides for ready made half cola, guarantees of recurrence and traditional repetition. The translations we will use, in the epic section of this course, will to some extent capture the logistics of the Greek epic forms. You will see from our comments on Week Five, on Pindar, what different strategies came to be used by the masters of the epic imagination.

Reading

Robert Fitzgerald's translation of the *Odyssey* (New York, 1974) is my own favorite, for its precision and beauty and cared for sentiment. But there are a number of outstanding modern translations of this epic—how better could the poem prove its greatness?—and you might even sample the prose version by A.S. Kline, online, a recent and practical version.

*Highly recommended:* Stephen Mitchell (New York, 2011) and Robert Fagles (New York, 1990). Also highly recommended: *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York, 1987). (Please read the entire epic this week.)

### *Discussion*

*The Odyssey* has always been your instructor's favorite work of Greek literature! Why? It is dramatic, funny, adventurous, alert to the energy and ingenuity of life, deeply poetic: and rewarded, because throughout Western cultural tradition Odysseus has persisted as the most germinal source for new understandings of the human possibility. Does any 'figure' in the *Iliad* catch your attention with his/her humanity in the manner of Odysseus?

## Hesiod *Works and Days*; *Theogony*

**The epic poet as Muse possessed.** The epic imagination, as tracked in the creations of Homer, had been passed down for centuries by rhapsodes, professional singers of the sort we noted in connection with the Phaeacian tale in *The Odyssey*. During this long period, it was customary for the epic creator to address his poem, at the beginning, as if he were not an individual creator but a channel for the inspiration of the Muses. (The Muses themselves were offspring of the goddess Mnemosyne, which means 'memory.')

Thus the *Iliad* opens with '*menin aeide thea*'... 'sing to me goddess of the wrath of....' while the *Odyssey* opens with '*andra moi ennepe, Mousa*'... 'of that man sing to me, O muse....' But that initiatory formula is not the only pattern available to the Greek epic poet, though it is a pattern reminiscent of a culture world in which individualism is sharply subordinated to the codes of the whole culture. The epic poet Hesiod (seventh century B.C.), creating in the same formulaic hexameter as Homer, speaks to us as an *individual* voice with no pretensions to channeling inspiration. It is not that he has no higher pretensions, for in fact he believes the Muses have given him the power to 'sing the story of things, the future and the past,' but he is quite clear that he, a Boeotian herdsman and narrator from a wretched farmland near the village of Ascra (Boondocksville!), *has been given his power by the Muses*. The Muses do not sing through Hesiod, but empower *him* to sing.

**Import of Hesiod's epics.** What remains to us, from that empowerment, is two small epics, *The Works and Days* and the *Theogony*, both of which you will read this week. The *Theogony* describes the origins of the universe out of chaos, the gradual power take-over by the Olympian gods, the struggles that pit Ouranus against Cronos, and fitfully usher in the current interrelated pantheon of the Olympian gods. As you read this poem, which may seem arid in the way (to many of us today) we find the genealogical lineages in the first books of the Old Testament, you may want to reflect on the fruitfulness of this work for the growth of the first Greek philosophy, which (ahead Week Six) will employ, in its search for a first principle (*arche*), the same kind of research thinking that generates Hesiod's *arche* of Chaos, his first principle, from which all else grew. But that fruitfulness is not the only cultural value of Hesiod's work. He packs into this epic not only a mythography of the lineage of the gods, but he enriches his argument, that reason and justice on the whole, in the end, prevail, with a counter vision of the progressive decline of the state of mankind from an original Golden State to the condition of Bronze in which humanity currently finds itself. In other words Hesiod is creating a conscious and analytical—if somewhat inconsistent—theology from within the center of the Greek mythical perspective. You will at once distinguish this personal statement, of an individual representative of his society, from the on-high channeling of the great epic poetry of Homer, and while you will (doubtless?) be swept up by Homer's narrative, and hardly by Hesiod's, you will reflect that the pathways of personal individuation, which were to lead into the 'modern world' of fifth century B.C. Athens, were trodden by free thinking individuals (like Hesiod), more than by singers in the great epic tradition.

**Tenor of Hesiod's epic work.** *The Works and Days* narrates out from a grudge argument against a brother who has dealt inequitably with the narrator, Hesiod, and from there the poem continues to discuss issues for the agricultural householder of the time: when to plant, when to plow, how to use the knowledge of the stars for sea travel, how to bend to the unavoidable dictates of fate. The tenor of this poem is that of a Yankee farmer writing in formal hexameter lines, bowing his head—as do all farmers—to the fate the environment provides them, and writing with sustained fealty to the plans of the gods. We can hardly imagine a perspective less Homeric, less regally formulated. Nor are we sure whether to include Hesiod, as well as Homer, under the rubric of epic imagination. The hexameter is the force that binds Homer to Hesiod as part of a distinctive genre for seeing the world.

**Hesiod's imagination and that of the Romantic Movement.** The point comes right here, in offering the introductory material of this syllabus, when we have to face the issue of 'imagination,' as bannered in our presentation of our major categories. Explaining what we mean by these categories was made more difficult by the meaning of *imagination* established during the critical thought of the Romantic movement in Europe. What Wordsworth and Coleridge meant by imagination, as they promoted the term in the early nineteenth century, was work done, in the artistic creator's mind, which gathers, joins, and recreates vestiges of the experienced world—especial emphasis here on the world of nature—which are then recast in a new 'imaginative' form, transformed the way a country road is transformed by being calling a 'ribbon of moonlight.' The ancient Greeks—like most ancient culture people-- not only did not have a term with the modern meaning of 'imagination,' but inclined to describe literary works in terms of their formal qualities. Thus the epic imagination, as the Greeks understood it, was marked above all by its use of the dactylic hexameter, while the lyric and dramatic, and for that matter the prose genres like philosophy and history, were also distinguishable by the formal vehicles that generated them—the choral odes of tragedy, the distichs or anapests of lyric, the paratactic structures of the prose historians. The dactylic hexameter, consequently, is the first line of affinity between Homer and Hesiod, and a sufficient reason to see lyric and dramatic forms as separate from the epic. It is therefore essential for you to expose yourself both to the sound and the analysis of that dactylic verse form. By choosing Fitzgerald and Lattimore among our translators, not only of Homer but of Hesiod, we come as close as we can in living English translation, to appreciating the sound and import of this epic line.

### *Reading*

*Works and Days, Theogony, and The Shield of Heracles*, translated by Richmond Lattimore (Ann Arbor, 1991.) (Please read in entirety.)

### *Discussion*

There is considerable dispute over the unity of 'Hesiod.' (In fact, also over the unity of Homer's work. Did he compose it all? Is composition the right word, or were the Homeric epics strands of traditional material which were woven together in the late eighth century by an editor or editors?) Do you see a common thread binding together the two epic works of Hesiod? Do you see in those works the marks of a single and singular genius? Or rather of an educated 'man on the street'?

*General point:* the written papers are where the work of this class takes muscular form. We see what we are doing when we write. Have you started writing? Do you see the larger form of your whole perspective in this class, even though we are barely launched? (Have you read *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*? Covey argues for starting at the end, in any project. Can you do that in this course?) *Remember: suggested paper topics are listed as the ends of Weeks Five, Ten, and Sixteen, but should be consulted well in advance, as aids in your planning.*

## Pindar The Odes

**Is Pindar an epic poet?** Still in the section of our course devoted to the epic imagination, we come with the poetry of Pindar to an animal difficult to classify. Epic, in a sense, the vision of Pindar certainly is. This Theban poet (522-443 B.C.), born well over a century after the writings of Hesiod, and perhaps twice that since the 'Pisistratean recension' that recorded the works of Homer at the end of the eighth century, is in one sense the new individual of the Athenian fifth century, a distinctive stylist, a praiser of glory in the individualist games and races that focused the attention of his contemporaries, and yet at the same time—and here is where the 'epic' comes in—a celebrant above all of the heroic commitment to excellence, and of the heroic male ideal underlying that commitment. The in-between position of Pindar is illustrated by the use he makes of myth in his poetry. Myth there is, everywhere in his *Odes*, and of a consistent piece with the godlike verbal affiliations we find in both Homeric epics, but as often as not Pindar tweaks myth in such a way as to make private use of it.

**The texts and performance of Pindar.** The remaining texts of Pindar have come to us from many manuscripts and palimpsests, and though what remains to us constitutes work carried out over a long period (498-444 B.C.) the totality of what is left is only a fragment of Pindar's huge 'output,' work firmly lodged in the age of writing and parchment replication, and continuously expanding through Pindar's life-role as an invited praiser-poet at games, races, and regal celebrations. (His work was largely occasional, and devoted to praising the *arête*/excellence of victors in contests; doing so for audiences of the educated and wealthy, who were the ones able both to support his creativity and to read and understand his difficult work.) It will not be a surprise, given this performative nature of Pindar's work, on the spot and admiring, that the language structures of that work differ profoundly from those required for Homer and Hesiod, who were (very differently from one another) retailing the epic perspective to audiences far removed from the events or ideas about which they were hearing.

**The conditions of production.** We have mentioned the dactylic hexameter as the vehicle of epic in its initial phase, but in Pindar we face a complex metrical world suited to the music and dance which (we gather) were the production-setting of Pindar's work. The melding of that distinctive metrical world with the thematics of a Pindaric ode represents a new societal world, in which not only were great tales told, but were told in a manner germane to a discursive and democratic society. A look at the first Olympian Ode, for Hiero of Syracuse, should uncover the packaging of such productions.

**The choral dance performance of the First Olympian Ode of Pindar.** The language of this performance, first of all, is not based on a single kind of 'foot,' like the dactyl, but on a counterpoint of iambs with anapests. This counterpoint is distributed by a dance chorus according to the dance steps performed by the presenters of this great ode, which is designed to celebrate the victory of Hiero's chariot in a major chariot race. (It is not the charioteer but the chariot owner who receives the praise here.) The distribution of the contrasting metrical patterns is coordinated with the moves of the dance—during which the ode in question is recited. Those moves are triadic, consisting of three different turns—*strophe* (meaning *turn*), *antistrophe* (meaning *a turn in the opposite direction*), and *epode*, a *stationary summative choral move* in which the tale being narrated/presented is advanced to a new theme.

**The Content of Pindar's First Olympian Ode.** In the case of Pindar's First Olympian Ode, for instance, the challenge is to celebrate the victory of Hiero in a major chariot race at Olympia—one of the first Peloponnesian sites at which the greatest games and festivals of

Archaic Greece were held. The ode consists of four triads—four combinations of the three dance modes—and moves through them with a daring brilliance of allusion, which—*please note this carefully*—refers extensively to the nature and fate of the divine Pelops, name giver to the Peloponnesus, whose ivory shoulder is explained in detail, in such a fashion that the divine background of Pelops is brought to an explanation of his own astounding gifts as a charioteer, gifts which, we are given to understand by the end of the ode, apply equally to the charioteer of Hiero, on whom the implications of more than human skill rub off. (There is a detailed account of this detailed narrative in Knox, *The Norton Book of Classical Literature*, pp. 251-258; I recommend that dense but readable survey for insights into how the Pindaric ode is put together.) The conclusion of this ode, noble praise of both King Hiero and of the poet himself, raises the mortal events of a horse race to an epic level--celebrating human greatness which intersects with the immortal--which we noted in placing Pindar in the same category as Homer. In that regard, however, it is also worth noting that while in Homer events of athletic prowess are described in some detail—as in the encounter of Odysseus with the Phaeacians, which we described in Week Three—in Pindar the actual athletic performance being celebrated is hardly mentioned, embedded as it is in ennobling myth and the drama of the ode dance.

### *Reading*

Pindar, *The Odes*, trans. Bowra (London, 1982).

Pindar, *Odes for Victorious Athletes*, trans. Burnett (Baltimore, 2010).

(Please read all of the Pindaric odes.)

### *Discussion*

Does Pindar belong to the epic tradition, or he is a product of a 'new society,' that of fifth century Athens, in which individual achievement—that of great athletes and great impresarios—is of foremost importance?

The concept of *arête*, 'excellence,' is central throughout Greek culture. The flaw that brings down the victims of tragedy—which we will read shortly—is the flaw of missing the mark (as in shooting an arrow at a target); while the ability to hit the bull's eye is the mark of the excellent marksman. Skill, precision, training all go into the making of *arête*, and are exemplified in the skills Pindar sees in his athletes, patrons, and himself as poet. Where do you find that trademark concern with *arête* in Homer?

And, by the way, do we still value that *arête* in contemporary society? Where do you see it? In the Olympic Games? In the Special Olympics?

*Is it right to consider Pindar part of the epic tradition? Is his perspective congruent with those of Homer and Hesiod?*

*Do the Iliad and the Odyssey seem to spring from the same poet? We have treated the two epics as offspring of a single Homer; were we right to do that?*

*What makes the hexameter an appropriate line for the Greek epic? How do you compare it, as a vehicle of expression, with the iambic pentameter line, which is the classic vehicle of extended English language poetry?*



## Early Greek Philosophy: The Milesians

**Epic poetry and the early Greek philosophy of Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes.** The epic imagination privileged comprehensive poetic visions of the order of the cosmos and of the passions displayed by the noble figures of adventure and folk thought. In other words the epic vision, even in a sometimes prosaic writer like Hesiod, inclines to imagine the big picture. While sharing this big picture concern, the philosophical imagination took a different path into the description of what the world is. We may best consider that path as one of analysis, the taking apart of the experienced world, to see what makes it tick, as distinct from the epic poet's embrace in formalized language of the outflowering meanings of the human and natural world. We can see the *philosophical* dimension of thought in the earliest Greek rational analysis, emerging from the Greek speaking cultural centers of Asia Minor. While it may seem that the three Milesian 'philosophers,' working from Asia Minor in the sixth century, created kinds of mythology of the chief elements of the physical world--*air, fire, water*—we will find, upon looking further, that the *analytical* impulse is what prevails in the thinking of these men.

**The analytic imagination.** Epic poetry delights in narratives built on narratives, and on extensive—and of course meaningful—adventuring into implication, meaning, and interpretation. The earliest forms of philosophy in Greece grew up through the mists of Greek cultural awareness, and in the forms of mythology, the complex of tales the Greeks worshipped and fabulated through, meanings of the physical and spiritual world were constantly put into play. (The dance of fantasy with hard thought is what makes a great mythology like the Greek of lasting interest.) But mythology is only a step toward analysis...and rarely pursues its narratives to a conclusion. With the Milesians, from the cultural center of Miletus in Asia Minor, with its face toward the older and more sophisticated cultures of the East—Babylonian, Egyptian—the mythic impulse began to assume the form of a reflective address to the tales told by the Greeks from immemorial time. Into these world narratives was inserted a question: *what is the essence of the dramatic life epic and myth bring before us?* And above all, as the Milesians were basic inquirers, and lived on a coastline where material elements were conspicuous, *the question of essences directed itself to the phenomena of nature.* We are ready to address the particular answers the Milesians gave, to the question of essences, but we should not hurriedly move beyond the mere fact that a question of this sort was posed. The intervention of a question onto narratives interrupts the flow of telling, and organizes a demand on the listener.

**Thales (ca. 585 B.C.) and his question.** Thales' question was apparently *what is the first principle of reality, that from which all derives?* (Apparently: the few fragments that remain to us from Thales are embedded in the writing of other philosophers, especially of Aristotle, and can be very cryptic.) Aristotle gives the following, in explanation of Thales' answer: *Over the number, however, and the form of this kind of principle they (the Milesian philosophers) do not agree: but Thales, the founder of this type of philosophy, says it (the first principle) is water, and therefore declared that the earth is on water... (Metaphysics 983 b 6).* Thales' water-answer falls in line with the cosmological thinking of those Babylonian and Sumerian speculations—indeed with the perspective of the Book of *Genesis*—for which our just created world is imagined floating on a body of water, the mists from which gradually clear to reveal the firm contours of a landmass. In any case, we clearly see the difference between Thales' imagination, in addressing the meaning of the world, and that of the other two Milesian thinkers frequently joined to him.

**Anaximander (610-546 B.C.) and Anaximenes (585-528 B.C.).** Anaximander was a disciple of Thales. His imaginative turn was to pose to himself many questions about the nature, shape and movements of the earth and heavens, and above all about the first principle of all he observed on the earth. 'He says that it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but some other indefinite nature, from which came into being all the heavens and the worlds in them.' (The Greek word, *to apeiron*, means 'the indefinable,' and is often translated as 'the cosmic infinite.' All things pass into and out of that *apeiron*, in a constant circular sequence of births and destructions.) Anaximenes was a pupil of Anaximander. Here is his view, as stated by a later Greek commentator: 'Anaximenes ...also says that the underlying nature is one and infinite like Anaximander, but not undefined as Anaximander said but definite, for he identifies it as air...being made finer it becomes fire, being made thicker it becomes wind, then cloud, then (when thickened still more) water, then earth, then stones...'

**Is this Milesian thinking a form of imagination? Is it literature?** In this syllabus we are putting pressure on the terms *imagination* and *literature*. By *imagination* we mean, here, style of conceiving and reporting on the world. The epic poet's style of doing this is different from that of the Milesian philosopher. The epic poet elaborates an artistically formalized account of the world; the Milesian philosopher cuts the richness of the world back to its essence. Is the word *literature* large enough to cover both of these kinds of action? The word *literature* will suffice, if we interpret it as the Milesians interpreted their world-stuff. Literature means a creation out of *litterae*, letters, and is one of the ways humans express themselves in sound and writing. The literary act is the act of working in letters, the language you are, to inflect your expression of the world. Interpreted in that way, the term *literature* expands to cover a variety of actions—epic poetry, philosophy, and other fields, like dramatic expression, lyric expression, and historical expression.

### *Reading*

*Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle*, ed. Reginald Allen (New York, 1966.) (Read the section on the three pre-Socratic Milesians. Then explore farther in any of the several relevant works listed in the Collateral Reading at the end of this whole syllabus.)

### *Discussion*

When I am asked what 'philosophy' is I find it hard to answer. Too many answers come into my mind. Tracking philosophy to its historical roots, in a kind of inquiry, is useful for me. It helps me to understand some basic impulses of what today we call 'philosophy.' *Inquiry* itself is already a kind of mind-turn which leads to a distinctive kind of 'imagination,' as we are using that term here.

To note, and keep in mind. When we get to 'history,' the last of our five imagination-types, we will find that the word *history*—the Greek word *historia*—derives from the Greek verb meaning *to inquire, historeo*. Please remember to ask yourself how the inquiry that takes place in 'history' differs from the inquiry that takes place in 'philosophy.'

## Socrates

**Socrates (469-399 B.C.) as an Athenian.** Socrates, the most prominent Greek philosopher of the fifth century, saw the century out with his death. He belongs to his own time fiercely, as an ambulatory thinker and 'gadfly,' known for his lifetime of conversing with his fellow citizens. But he had other reasons to respect himself: as a military man who performed yeoman service in the many wars Athens fought in the mid-fifth century; as a senator from his district; as a householder with sons; in short as a full-complement citizen of Athenian democracy. His death, known to all, is a shame to Athens, but 'makes sense' from certain perspectives.

**Socrates and his place in Greek analytic thought.** Throughout his public life Socrates, who was a follower of Anaxagoras (500-428 B.C.), remained in or near Athens, often teaching and discussing in public. (Prefatory note: the life and thought of Socrates, who never wrote, is preserved for us by his pupil, Plato, and it is very hard to distinguish Socrates the man from the figure of Socrates who is an essential character in Plato's work, appearing continually as a key figure in Plato's dialogues. We will be reading, as our week's assignment, three dialogues of Plato which document 'the last days of Socrates.')

The main themes of his own teaching are simple, but his gift both for poetry and argumentation lifts those themes to world importance. Above all, Socrates remains true to the questioning tradition which dominated Milesian thought, and which we have seen marking out a path sharply different from the mythological thinking of archaic Greek epic poetry. (Chronology matters here. The Milesians we read flourished in the first half of the sixth century, Socrates in the second half of the fifth century: over a century passed here, in which early Milesian thought was being supplemented by a lineage of distinguished thinkers—Heraclitus, Parmenides, Pythagoras—who were all formative for Socrates. Socrates found himself at the end of a distinguished line of 'analytical' thinkers.)

**Socrates' argument.** It is important to start with what Socrates did not do as a philosopher. He did not lay down doctrines, positions that could be repeated and analyzed by others. Instead, he argued out the implications of ethical decision, by challenging interlocutors to examine what was involved in their beliefs. For example, when those who talked with him expounded ideas of what constituted virtue, he led them to examine those ideas and, in every case, to show themselves up as not knowing what they meant and not knowing the implications of what they said. In mock humility, Socrates subjected himself to the same ruthless kind of critique. He referred—in the *Apology*, the trial statement which we will read this week—to the widely known response of the Delphic oracle that Socrates is the wisest of men. This verdict seemed to Socrates to be indefensible until he began to query men who considered themselves wise, and found that they had no understanding of, for instance, what constitutes virtue or courage. And in what did Socrates exceed these other candidates for wisdom? He knew that he was not wise, while all the others thought, mistakenly, that they were wise. This method of inquiry, by which the interlocutor is invited to trap himself in admissions of ignorance, is the basic form of Socratic argument, and was by subsequent critics called his *elenchos*, or cross-examination, technique. It will already be apparent, perhaps, that other philosophical positions will build from this *elenchos* work; it is clear that for Socrates an evanescent *truth* is the essence against which inquiry takes place. From that implication we may already site the influence of Socrates on the huge written opus of his pupil Plato.

**Who was Socrates?** Socrates remains a mysterious figure. He wrote nothing, and so we are dependent, for our knowledge about him, on others who wrote about him. (There are three main sources of this kind: Xenophon, the memoirist and military historian, who lived Socrates' world; the comic writer Aristophanes, who pilloried Socrates in contemporary

plays like *The Birds*—see readings for Week Fourteen--and Plato, for whom Socrates became a leitmotif for increasingly refined dialogues of thought.) What most grounds Socrates is his trial, his reaction to it, and the place he played in his time. The trial in question stemmed from a culture suspicious above all of religious unorthodoxy; and the initial charge was that Socrates was indifferent to traditional religious practices. The world in which Socrates was put to death, for suspicions of this sort, was one in which public self-confidence was at a low.

**The historical setting of the trial and death.** A history of Ancient Greece (like the text by Thomas Martin, recommended for our course) will help to guide you through the rapids of Greek cultural history from 700 to 350 B.C. Socrates died in 399 B.C., as you know, Plato (next week's assignment) in

348 B.C., Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., Aristotle in 322 B.C. During the three centuries prior to Alexander's death Athens—remember our emphasis is falling on *Athens*, though a coherent (if less interesting) history could have been written about Thebes, Corinth, Sparta, and other city-states—passed through many social/political turns: during the seventh century the city-state defined itself slowly off from the epic clan and family world of Homer, making possible the growth, by the sixth century, of early forms of democracy, a coinage economy, a useable legal system, and a cohesive military force. The fifth century debuts with a huge challenge, The Persian Wars, which provide tumultuous victory followed quickly, in mid-century, by conflict and then War between Athens and Sparta, the two allies active in defeating the Persians. The teachings of Socrates occurred in an Athens which was on the verge of its eventual defeat by Sparta, and the death of Socrates coincided with post war confusion, and a shaky alternation between tyranny and return to democracy. In the midst of such rapid change, Athens found itself hungry for its old traditions, suspicious of new and tricky teachings like those of the Sophists—which Socrates had nothing to do with—and ready for a kind of Joseph McCarthy purge of unorthodox thinkers. Into that vortex Socrates fell.

### *Reading*

*The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro; The Apology; Crito; Phaedo*, trans. Tredennick (New York, 1993). (Read all four dialogues. You may well want to explore more Platonic dialogues this week: try *The Phaedo* or *The Symposium*).

### *Discussion*

How do you understand the cultural climate that led to the death of Socrates? Was his gadfly questioning so offensive to that many people of power? What were they afraid of? Did the Milesian philosophers, who queried the essence of nature, not equally disturb people? (It did not). Was it that Socrates went to the heart of the person, and stirred up internal anxieties? Would Socrates in any way resemble Jesus Christ, in his disturbing mission?

Have we any parallels to Socrates in contemporary society? Have you heard of I.F. Stone? Have you read H.L. Mencken? What do we do with gadflies?

## Plato

**The philosophic imagination and historical context.** By concentrating on imaginative styles, in this syllabus, we have had to limit our attention to 'historical context.' We are discussing styles of expression and thought in Ancient Greek culture, but at the same time, inevitably, sacrificing an analysis of the historical bedding of the uses of the imagination. It will be well to comment, no matter how briefly, on the world of post fifth century Athens, the world which saw at its beginning the tragic execution of Socrates.

The prosperity which had so buoyed Athens by the mid-fifth century, especially after the defeat of the massive Persian naval force at the Battle of Salamis (480 B.C.), found itself gradually eroded by such nagging calamities as the Peloponnesian War (finally lost conclusively to Sparta in 404 B.C.), the exhaustion of the Laurion Silver Mines, which had been a major source of military wealth for the polis, and politically reckless moves like the Sicilian expedition, on which the Athenians wasted money and manpower. The history of the fourth century in Greece will lack the clear cut drama provoked by Athenian brilliance a century earlier. The first forty years of the fourth century saw the major city states--Athens, Sparta, and Thebes--interlocked in family power-games and warfare, the old spirit of democracy slowly leaching from the political Athenians. When Philip II became King of Macedon, in 359 B.C. the profile of Greek history veered, giving way to the power of Greece's northern neighbor, and to the powerful monarchical tradition that culminated in the reign of Alexander the Great, who from 333 B.C. to his death in 323 B.C. created a vast Empire which included Hellas within it, and reached to India. It is significant to our course, that even inside the turbulent fractures that disturbed the Greek polis during the fourth century, two of the greatest Western philosophers unfolded extensive commentaries on the nature of life. Plato died in 348 B.C., while his pupil Aristotle died in 322 B.C.

**Life of Plato.** Plato was born in 428 B.C., and was thus a young man during the Peloponnesian War, the public teaching of Socrates, and many of the greatest achievements of Greek tragedy and comedy. Born into a distinguished family, he naturally gravitated to the intellectually intense public life of central Athens, where he encountered the Sophists, and became a friend of the forty-years older Socrates, a conspicuous public figure and a contentious but admired gadfly of the society. Drawn to Socrates, for his wit, wisdom, and daring, Plato dedicated his own earliest writing—for he was from the start a thinker and man of letters—to dramatizing the implications of the death of Socrates. (Plato's dialogues called *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Euthyphro* all treat of that death.) With those texts, and others, Plato launched a career of dialogue writing which was to grow in richness and depth until the end of his life. From that huge opus of dialogues we will, in this course, be devoting our attention to *The Republic* (389 B.C.), arguably Plato's most realized and influential work. (We will have to content ourselves with a few references to other works.) He was by no means only active in writing, however. In 388 B.C. he traveled throughout Sicily and Italy, returning to Athens the following year to a period of intense writing—the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium* and other dialogues were composed at this time—only to return again to Sicily in 367 B.C. and again in 361 B.C., at the invitation of Dionysius II. The purpose of these visits was to make a philosopher-king—the ideal ruler in Plato's *Republic*—out of the young ruler of Syracuse. The results were hugely unsatisfactory, and Plato finally returned home to Greece, to care for and direct the extraordinary 'first University in the West,' the Academy of which he was the founder. He worked there, tutoring students of such global significance as Aristotle, until his death. (Interestingly enough the Academy itself survived all manner of geopolitical turmoil, to remain intact until 529 A.D., when the Emperor Justinian closed it down.) It was while directing the Academy, in the last twenty years of his life, that Plato wrote the deepest of his dialogues—*The Theatetus*, *The Sophist*, *The Timaeus*, *The Laws*.

**The perspectives of Plato's philosophy.** The analytic trend, in which we have found the signature of Greek philosophy, beginning with the Milesians, developed alongside the practice of question-asking—which from the start we contrasted to the accumulative, generative thought practices of the epic poetic tradition. We have seen that the Milesian penchant for questioning the essential components of the universe translated, in Socrates—and through a formative tradition linking Socrates to his Milesian background—into a remorseless querying of individuals on issues of ethical values. That social turn of Socrates was always strong in Plato, for whom the dialogue form was naturally a dramatization of kinds of relations among individuals. With Plato, the dialogue form becomes a springboard into ever widening philosophical inquiries, *epistemological* (how do we know?), *metaphysical* (of what ultimate sort must reality be, for us to live it as we do?), *aesthetic* (is there such a thing as beauty itself, apart from beautiful objects?) , and ultimately, into the intelligible foundations (the Forms) of the meaningfulness of the world we inhabit. Plato's depth and ingenuity, in tracking these fundamental issues of philosophy, led one of the twentieth century's great thinkers, Alfred North Whitehead, to say that all Western philosophy subsequent to Plato was a series of footnotes to Plato. One of the most accessible and influential of Plato's dialogues, *The Republic*, will give us the idea of Plato's depth and artistry. In that dialogue he uses Socrates as his mouthpiece—a Socrates far different from the Socrates we see in the *Apology*—to lead the lengthy discussion into the deepest nooks and crannies of political philosophy. What makes this discussion of the ideal state unique is that in order to ground the very idea of that state the argument must be ramified enough to include the Forms, the ultimate principles of justice, reason, and beauty. We are as far from the Milesian areas of questioning as we are from the level on which politics and the polis are discussed today.

### Reading

*The Great Dialogues of Plato*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse (New York, 2008). (Our assignment will be to read *The Republic*.)

### Discussion

Does Plato's thinking, in the *Republic*, seem to build on the fundamental insights of Socrates' teaching? What is Socrates' political philosophy, as far as you can tell?

What relation do you see between the actualities of Athenian democracy, in the fifth century, and the ideal Republic Plato envisages? Is Plato fond of some aspects of democracy?

What do you think of the dialogue form as a vehicle of argument? Does this vehicle provide advantages over the single narrator form of philosophizing we tend to know today? Are there examples, even in modern philosophy, of effective use of the dialogue for argument? Bishop Berkeley? David Hume? Kierkegaard?

## Archilochos and Sappho

**Lyric imagination and its historical setting.** We have devoted some attention to what we called the epic imagination and the philosophic imagination in ancient Greece. In so doing we have sacrificed chronology and orthodox history, leaving it to the inventive student—armed with a good brief political/social history of ancient Greece—to put the pieces together, observing that Homer's world is very different from that of Pindar which is equally different from that of Plato. With the present week's work we return to the so-called Archaic stage of Greek culture, seventh to mid sixth centuries, when the establishment of Homeric poetry in writing was already a fact, the spread of literacy, writing, and accordingly individualism was starting to make itself felt, and the economic and social structures of the fifth century polis were anticipated on the horizon. Archilochos (seventh century B.C.) and Sappho (late seventh--middle sixth century B.C.) will be our guides into this transitional world, and into the world of lyric expression, which is the surest indicator of social and cultural change. We are, 'suddenly,' face to face with distinctive and passionate *individuals*, and though they are addressing us in meters as formalized as those of the epic hexameter, these individuals are not channeled by the Muse, but are clearly exposed to us.

**Archilochos as lyric presence.** In discussing the epic tradition we have stressed the importance of the dactylic hexameter (in Homer and Hesiod) and the choral ode (in Pindar), the latter proving to be an innovation rooted in dance and music accompaniments to praise poems. With Archilochos (and the other lyric poets we discuss here) we come into a pluralistic metrical world, in which, though there is 'direct expression' of the individual, there are multiple prosodic vehicles for that expression: the *iambic* meter (often, in Archilochos, used for 'attack' or 'invective' poetry); and various lyric meters, declarative (*trochaics*), *anapestic* (tripping and springing), and *dactylic*, an echo from the epic. This variety of meters, fully exercised in Archilochos, mediates personal expression; we remain far from free verse in the modern sense. And yet we remain immersed in the passions.

**Archilochos and the remains of his work.** We know one date in Archilochos' life, 648 B.C., the occasion of a total eclipse of the sun over the Aegaeon: 'Nothing in the world can surprise me now....for Zeus, father of the Olympians, has turned midday into black night by shielding light from the blossoming sun, and now dark terror hangs over mankind...' Apart from that event, what we know of Archilochos comes from his own poems—and in that he hardly differed from the Athenians of the fifth century; their lives have to be reconstructed by comments from others, often embedded in texts/papyri reduced to a line or two. The evidence we deduce from Archilochos' poems themselves suggests he was a mercenary soldier, that on one occasion he had thrown away his shield and fled from battle, that he had a great love for Neoboule (not 'romance'), that he preferred short tough individualistic fighting men to aristocratic pretty boys, and so on: from his remaining poems and fragments we can create the profile of a Thasian fighting man with such and such traits. Yet as we are looking at the lyric of personal expression, here, we had better take a sharp look. It is true that, in his lyrics which are mostly incomplete, Archilochos gives us content-lines which purport to be autobiographical glimpses, but self-expression in the lyric is not that transparent. The reliability of information given in a lyric is suspect, and must be read in terms of the speaker and the tone of the whole piece. In most cases, if we look closely at the ancient lyric, we will find many reasons to doubt that it is personally revelatory. (Please review the shrewd discussion of this issue by Knox, in the *Norton Book of Classical Literature*, pp. 202-203). Finally, what do you think you can learn about a man from a little poem like the following?

The fox knows many tricks, the hedgehog only one.  
One good one.

**Sappho and her work.** Like Archilochos, the person Sappho (630?-570 B.C.) is hard to reconstruct. (Here, even in the midst of the first expressions of personal feeling in Greek culture, the job of rediscovering whole identities behind the mask is almost impossible.) We get the general picture, from the numerous remaining pieces of her intricate lyrics. If we can take our texts at face value, we presume that Sappho was a lady of distinguished rank, living a privileged life on the island of Lesbos, and that she was a member of a coterie of sophisticated female peers, with whom she shares strong passions—perhaps in the setting of the awaiting of marriages, which will separate them. Hence, much longing, much concern about loss, much delicate feeling interwoven with the metrical form we call Sapphic. The rest, as they say, is pure poetry, standard setting for all time, and untranslatable. And yet we try, as did the American poet and classicist Richmond Lattimore, who boldly tackles the Sapphic stanza form:

Like the very gods in my sight is he who  
sits where he can look in your eyes, who listens  
close to you, to hear the soft voice, its sweetness  
    murmur in love and

laughter, all for him. But it breaks my spirit;  
underneath my breast all the heart is shaken.  
let me only glance where you are, the voice dies,  
    I can say nothing,

but my lips are stricken to silence, under-  
neath my skin the tenuous flame suffuses;  
nothing shows in front of my eyes, my ears are  
    muted in thunder.

And the sweat breaks running upon me, fever  
shakes my body, paler I turn than grass is;  
I can feel that I have been changed, I feel that  
    death has come near me.

### *Reading*

Santos, Sherod, *Greek Lyric Poetry: A New Translation* (New York, 2006).

Campbell, David, ed. *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Bristol, 2003).

Davenport, Guy, *Seven Greeks: Archilochos, Sappho, Alkman, Anacreon, Herakleitos, Diogenes, Herondas* (New York, 1995).

(Read all of Sappho and Archilochos! Then explore the poets!)

### *Discussion*

Do you feel you can come in contact with Archilochos and Sappho as 'persons,' and not just as formal poets, whose work has survived for us in fragmentary form? Is the formidable distance, that separates us from these individuals, crossable?

What do you think of the translations you are reading, here and throughout this course? They are important vehicles, no? Are you on the side of literal translation? Have you



checked out several different versions of the same poem? (That could be a good paper topic!)

### **Solon and Heronda: The Political Lyrics**

**Solon and Herondas. What joins them?** With these two poets, we press to the limits the checkerboard quality of the timeframe of this course. But we can turn the oddity into an advantage, by highlighting the dramatic changes Athens underwent from the mid-seventh to mid-sixth century (Solon) to the first half of the third century (Herondas.). In other words, from the very beginning of the Classical Period to the late Hellenistic wind-down of classical Hellenism. We have already looked at the cultural chasm separating, say, the mind of Hesiod (seventh century B.C) from that of Plato (d. 348 B.C.) three hundred years later. What did we find there? Hesiod works wholeheartedly inside an integral, archaic and formalized tradition of expression, while Plato—and this appears even in our limited readings, *The Apology* and *The Republic*—works out into a wide ranging and daring topography of new thoughts and theories, his voice, even through the dialogue form, coming across as subtly aware of the ‘modern person-world.’ Something of the same contrast links Solon and Herondas, both of whom were poets, and concerned, though very differently, with the landscape of social behavior. Solon, as distinguished lawgiver/poet, wrote in curried elegiac couplets about the new laws he instituted for the city of Athens, and the benefits he brought to civil order, self-control and rule of law—all of which he actually did; while Herondas, long after Athens had shown what a marvelous democracy it was capable of mounting, though for a brief century, looks with a jaundiced *oeil critique* at the foibles and oddities of his own time, as they are reflected in his home island of Kos and (probably) in travels to Egyptian Alexandria, a center of culture and trends.

**Solon.** The outburst of fine lyric, in the thawing Archaic Age of Greece, seventh century, largely took place outside Athens: on the Asia Minor coast, on the Greek islands—Lesbos and Paros, in the cases of Sappho and Archilochos—while Athens remained behind in this development. It was the Athenian victory over Megara, for possession of Salamis, that brought Solon and the Athenian lyric to the fore. In 590 Solon was appointed Chief Magistrate for the year, in Athens, and tasked to bring harmony between the rival social groups—rich and poor—whose mutual hostility threatened to break out into Civil War. Solon describes his efforts, to pursue this policy, in largely grave and self-reflective iambs—again regular and organized in pattern—and in a discursive style which foreshadows the dialogue of characters in Greek tragedy a century later. For the range in Solon, consider the following:

*This man Solon is a shallow thinker and a fool;  
for the gods give him great goods, but he does not take them.  
He throws a great net around his prey, but then does not draw it in,  
He has neither good sense nor the will to use it.  
If I came to power, I'd grab all I could,  
tyrannizing the Athenians if even for one day only,  
even if I and my family were later to be flayed into a wineskin.*

Self-reflective irony of this stripe is totally unfamiliar from earlier Greek poetry. In the Homeric epic there is no room for authorial voice, because the narrator is cloaked behind the vast panoply he cedes to the Muse. Poets like Sappho and Archilochos display many ranges of subtle feeling, but they do not include reflection onto the voice expressing that feeling. Solon strikes a note that all of us today will recognize as a move toward ‘the modern tone.’

**Herondas.** Like Solon, Herondas, writing three centuries later, has his creative eye on the social scene. But while Solon was a poet/law giver/ reformer Herondas is a sophisticated observer, worldly to the last iamb. Mime One, which is fascinatingly translated by Douglass Parker in Knox, pp. 566-571, shows you how Herondas touches the depths of society, bawdiness, lust, and innuendo flowing through every word. In his manner of presenting this material, Herondas speaks for an artistic age, the Hellenistic, which pushes the limits of art, addresses the retro, self-involved pleasures of the artist in an age which *follows* the great achievements of classical culture. The work of Herondas is baroque, as distinguished from Renaissance, or camp as distinguished from naive, or postmodern as distinguished from modern. Herondas is creating at a time when genre *sculpture* abounds. Hellenistic sculptors portrayed subjects unknown in the high classical period....foreigners (such as the dying Gaul), drunkards, battered athletes, wrinkled old people. The pristine age of idealized nude sculptures has given way to the unique/eye-catching, just as the lyric of Solonian Athens, grave and yet artful, has given way to the mime poetry of an age full of curiosity, libido, and *interest*.

### *Reading*

The following website offers the Solon translations by John Lewis. They are pretty good. (Plenty of other choices, though, as you will see by brosing the web).

[www.classicalideals.com/Solon%20Poetry.htm](http://www.classicalideals.com/Solon%20Poetry.htm)[http://www.bing.com/search?q=solon poems in translation&pc=conduit&ptag=G445-A2B968EED61704F77B3F&form=CONTLB&conlogo=CT3210127&ShowAppsUI=1r](http://www.bing.com/search?q=solon+poems+in+translation&pc=conduit&ptag=G445-A2B968EED61704F77B3F&form=CONTLB&conlogo=CT3210127&ShowAppsUI=1r)

For Herondas, cf. Davenport, *Seven Greeks*, which we used in our reading for the preceding week.

Please read all that remains of these two poets!

### *Discussion*

Would Herondas' kind of camp social critique have been possible at an earlier stage of Greek culture than his, or was his critique tied to the sophisticated, 'post-classical' high-culture tone of the Alexandrian Age? What about reversing the question, to apply to Solon? Would his fairly stark, though artful, poems about justice and civil war have been possible at the time of Herondas? Or were they tied to the formative stage of the Greeks when a father-figure thinker was needed to lead the way into a new cultural stage?

*Are you convinced that early epic and early philosophy spring from the same root? Or do you see the epic and the philosophic imaginations as from the beginning seriously different?*

*Do you see a connection between Socrates' thought and that of the Pre Socratics? What is it?*

*To what extent do the early Greek lyric, and the political poetry of Solon and Herondas, give insights into the personalities of their creators?*

## Aeschylus

**Aeschylus** (525-456 B.C.). In seven extant dramas, produced in the first half of the fifth century B.C., the playwright Aeschylus takes us from the mythical imagination of the epic tradition into mimetic action aimed to engage the newly self-directing democracy of Athenian citizens. We move squarely into the world of the *dramatic imagination*.

**Greek drama and the dramatic imagination.** We may seem to be hurtling from one form of imagination to another, and from one time period of antiquity to another. And in fact that is what we are doing. Why? We want to display, above all, the stunning richness of the expressive powers of the Hellenic literary mind. To this point we have glanced at the epic, philosophic, and lyric imaginations—diverse as they are even within themselves—and can say of them all that they are the creations of virtual worlds, the world of vast epic story tale, the speculation of the mind on the nature of the world, the expression of the self in its inmost feelings. When we come to the drama, however, the realm of what Aristotle first spoke of as 'bodies in motion,' we are in a fresh new cross between 'reality' and 'fabrication.' We are thus impacted with a direct power unknown to other genres of literature! Where did this genre come from?

**The origins of Greek tragedy.** Unlike epic and philosophy, though not unlike the lyric, Greek tragedy seems to have grown out of dance and choral music. While the fifth century is the great period for both tragedy and comedy, there was an Archaic creative period, deep in the world of Hesiod's time, when rural/religious dance festivals, which mesh with the origins of lyric, began to create early forms of choral action. We see a form of this, not really a drama, in the celebratory paeans of Pindar. In the course of the sixth century, a first character or group spokesperson split off from the body of the dancers, and began to dialogue with them. This split-off figure became the first actor, and by century's end had been joined by a second actor. (Two actors plus chorus were the basic ingredients throughout the course of classical Greek drama, tragedy *and* comedy; but though we know such basics from our own observation, and from Greek commentators like Aristotle, we have only the sketchiest outlines of the sixth century developments that led to the great sophistication of fifth century tragedy.) We do know that significant theatrical structures were created during the sixth century B.C., and that by the time of Aeschylus the Theater of Dionysus served as a centerpiece of Athenian municipal life, built against the slopes of the Acropolis, and drawing to it large crowds on the occasion of major religious festivals.

**Now back to Aeschylus.** Aeschylus is the first classical dramatist we know, a writer of great vision and depth of human understanding, who took the choral-actor ingredients of the sixth century drama, and powerfully raised the expressive power of drama, as well as enriching the on-stage relationship between the chorus and the main, and eventually a second, actor. Though we have only seven remaining plays, out of some ninety he wrote, those works span a twenty-five year period during which Greek drama was evolving at a meteoric rate, and give us a perspective onto the whole genre. The oldest remaining play of Aeschylus, *The Persians* (472 B.C.), concerns the defeat of Xerxes in the Persian Wars, and (remarkably) puts itself empathetically inside the minds of the pitifully defeated Persian widows. Of the remaining Aeschylean plays we will this week read *The Oresteia* (458 B.C.), the only intact Greek trilogy, a three-play unit involving a climactic engagement with a single mythical theme.

**The Theme of the Oresteia.** The three plays of the Oresteia (that is, the tale of Orestes, son of Agamemnon) are based on themes from Greek mythology, and like most Greek tragedies form what the Greeks called 'slices from Homer's banquet.' In the first of these plays the Greek leader of the War against Troy returns home, his concubine with him, to

find a furious wife (and her lover) and to be slain by her outraged son Orestes. In the second play, which would be watched on the second day of the display of Aeschylus' work in the annual competition, we see Orestes paying the price for his unholy mother-murder, and the Erinyes, hag-like spirits of divine revenge, assaulting Orestes and driving him crazy. In the final play the Gods, led by Athena, hold a trial of Orestes at the law court on the slopes of the Acropolis, and in a very close decision exonerate the murderer. This powerful, supra realistic, immensely metaphorical and verbally structured drama—one might almost say 'opera'—deals overwhelmingly with issues of revenge, justice, honor and law. May it be left to you, o student, to explore into the finer points of the meter, dance, costuming, and scenographia which generate this unique memorial to the Greek dramatic imagination.

### *Reading*

Hughes, Ted, *The Oresteia of Aeschylus: A New Translation* (New York, 1999). (Read all seven of Aeschylus' plays, if possible!)

### *Discussion*

Can you make personal sense of the last play of the *Oresteia*? (Maybe I am the only one struggling with this issue!). The movements and reactions of the characters, in the first two plays, seem sufficiently 'realistic,' if 'distanced' from the ordinary. But the last play turns out to be a divine law-drama. Why was this the appropriate conclusion for the trilogy? Do we face here some profound cultural difference from the Greek sensibility? Don't the gods come across as mere counters, vehicles of votes? (Remember the interplay of costume, stilted shows, megaphoned voices, all those details we have had to pass over quickly, but which are so essential to the makeup of the Greek drama! Should we view the last play of this trilogy as an oratorio?)

## Sophocles

**Sophocles as master dramatist.** Sophocles (496-406 B.C.), often considered the greatest master of the Greek tragic form, died a half century after Aeschylus, leaving a legacy of seven extant dramas—well over a hundred plays in fragmentary condition, or simply ‘referred to’ by others-- and an unmatched record of successes in the annual theatrical contests at Athens. Sophocles competed in thirty annual competitions, and won twenty four-- defeating Aeschylus himself in more than one instance--while Aeschylus won fourteen times and Euripides, the third of the great tragedians extant to us, won only four times. (Yes, victory in these contests was a ‘popularity contest,’ but the fifth century Athenian theater goer, adult male citizens, was the central figure in a polity of unrivalled brilliance; no usual Broadway habitué, but heir to an already rich mythical/thematic tradition, and to a language which many centuries had by now polished.) You will see, this week, what was the ineffable secret of Sophocles’ greatness: his Olympian perspective, his intricate plots focusing on a single crucial event, his irony, and in the end, while retaining his skepticism about the universe, his granting to Fate a dignity, and spirit of justice, which ennoble even violent and beaten protagonists. We will read two plays, the early play *Antigone* (hard to date exactly) and the mature *Oedipus the King* (401 B.C.), which are arguably Sophocles’ greatest works, and which both concern tragic events in the royal House of Thebes.

**A word on the historical setting of Sophocles.** Sophocles created his plays during the second half of the fifth century B.C., while Aeschylus, as we have seen, created his during the first half. (We are playing a little loose with dates, but you can quickly Wikipedia out the relevant details, so far as we know them.) You will have seen, from your *Ancient Greece* by Martin, that both the highest brilliance, and the gradual unraveling of Athens take place in the second half of the fifth century B.C. Whereas the first half of the century saw the rapid development of political democracy, individualism in lyric and theater (Aeschylus), and above all the astonishing victories over the huge Persian Empire, the second half of the century was dominated by intra polis conflict on the Greek mainland, the breaking down of traditional values during the Sophist intervention in Athens, and above all the long-lasting Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.), with its devastating consequences for economic and social development. (I am putting a burden of history reading on you; if possible, give yourself time to read about the Sicilian Expedition, 415-413, which shows the fatal recklessness which was gripping Athenian ‘foreign policy’ at the time.) It was in this turbulent—if brilliant—second half of the great century that Sophocles created his masterpieces. And what do you know? They are masterpieces of classical *serenity!*

**What to look for in reading Sophocles.** Please continue to keep the chorus in mind. From the spectator’s point of view, watching from the banked stone seats of the Theater of Dionysus in Athens, the dance—turn, counterturn, standstill: intricate dance steps meshing with the highly refined prosody of the language--and the stilted, costumed appearance of the all male actors—all this would have exercised a startling operatic effect. (Mental reconstruction is essential here. The same with the classical Temple, like the Parthenon, which was brightly painted in its time, but from which the colors have all faded away, leaving the beautiful but misleading surface of gleaming marble, which we now associate with the public buildings of ancient Greece and Rome.) Above all, of course, look for the central theme or crisis, around which the drama is thrillingly disposed: the struggle, in *Antigone*, between tradition (traditional burial practice, so central to archaic culture) and the Realpolitik of state government (Creon’s province); the terrifying struggle of Oedipus to locate a polluting murderer who he himself is, and eventually, horribly, discovers.

*Reading*

*The Complete Plays of Sophocles*, translated by Robert Bagg and James Scully (New York, 2011). (We will read *Antigone* and *Oedipus The King*. If you can add *Oedipus at Colonus*, you will have read the entire Sophoclean treatment of the House of Thebes.)

### *Discussion*

In his *Poetics* (350 B.C.) Aristotle develops a (subsequently much debated about) theory of *catharsis*, by which he means the effect proper to the experience of high classical Greek drama—and especially to the experience of Sophocles' Theban plays. In some sense the catharsis in question must have been like a spiritual purging, arousing certain feelings, then driving them out, leaving the soul cleansed. Does this say anything to you? Do you feel 'exalted' by a play like *Oedipus the King*, despite its lethal conclusion?

## Euripides

**The new turn in tragic drama.** You will note that the life and work of Euripides (485-406 B.C.) overlap the work of both Aeschylus and Sophocles. You will also notice the startling difference in Euripides. We will read three of his dramas—should we call them melodramas?—this week, and will rapidly grasp the new turn given to the tradition by this prolific dramatist, of whom fate has left us nineteen plays.

**The historical setting again.** Before looking into the three plays assigned for this week, we need to revert to the historical setting. All that we have said of the setting of Sophocles and Aeschylus—those second half of the century geniuses—belongs in spades to the ambient culture of Euripides. The Sophists are important. These teachers of wisdom—including public thinkers and discussers like Protagoras and Gorgias—were of great influence in the second half of the fifth century. Why were these figures needed and turned to, and what did they offer? We have seen that there is a tradition of question-asking in Milesian philosophy, and that that tradition burgeons richly into the work of Plato. The Sophists were perpetual raisers of questions, and often underminers of traditional belief. Euripides was very alert to these voices. We have noted that, in connection with the recitation of the Homeric epics there was a tradition of itinerant bards, public reciters who drew public crowds around them. By the fifth century Athens was itself ready for public discussion in every sense. There was a buzz on the streets. With the advent of a democratic polity, in the early fifth century, the energy of public outdoor life grew vibrant in Athens—especially around the central Agora or market place, the Theater of Dionysus, and the Law Courts, not to mention the sacred sites on the Acropolis. In all of these senses Athenian culture was being freed up into a passion for ideas and discussion. The Sophists, ultimately lethal foes of Socrates, were natural components of this social ferment. And into this fermenting cultural matrix Euripides emerged, writing dramas in great numbers, touching on ‘melodramatic passions,’ raising controversial issues, striking a ‘modern’ tone.

**The themes of the *Medea* (431 B.C.), *The Hippolytus* (429 B.C.), and *The Bacchae* (405 B.C.).** These three plays show us Euripides at his most powerful, daring, and showmanly.

**The *Medea*.** You will see at once that *Medea*—a slice, of course, from the rich archive of mythical material available to every Greek writer—is par excellence two things typically minimized in fifth century Greek culture: first, a *foreigner*, second, a *woman* who is fully invested with women’s needs and attitudes. (Would you say the same of *Antigone*, or of *Cassandra* in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*?) Brought back to Greece from the exotic East, and by a conventional and deceitful mainstamer, Jason, *Medea* finds that her marriage and her children have been supplanted by a new bride, and her own exile. She takes the terrible revenge you are to read about! Et voilà! What has changed here, from Aeschylus and Sophocles? The outsider has been drawn into the Hellenic dialogue, with fierce consequences. We are growing away from the still nobility of the archaic classical posture—and Euripides is taking us there.

**The *Hippolytus*.** The intricacies of jealousy, insinuation, betrayal of innocence, melodramatic finale—all these elements of pop psychology become the raw material of this ‘modern’ drama, which bathes in the questioning, discussion-rich atmosphere of a literary culture which is conspicuously public. As in the *Medea*, Euripides penetrates, here, into the feelings which undergird those *ritual/mythical* behaviors which were the stock of epic, and of the two tragedians we have studied before Euripides. The fixed world of myth has been opened out to reveal the boiling humanity myth was initially created to temper.

**The Bacchae.** The Athens of the end of century was concerned not only with the new importance of women and foreigners, the foreign in general, but with psychologically 'modern' modes of feeling, emotional experimentation and quest, and passion breaking out from the mythical mold—where it is confined in the cases of Cassandra, Clytemnestra, or Antigone—square into the midst of Greek society. Pentheus, of course, is the perfect middle class bureaucrat foil against which to read the unlicensed and uncontrollable fury of the Bacchantes, exaggerated representatives of a strain of the demonic, which lurks throughout Greek culture, even when what we most expect is form and reason.

*Reading*

*Ten Plays by Euripides*, translated by Paul Roche (New York, 1998). (Our assignment will be to read the three plays discussed in this week's syllabus.)

*Discussion*

We are struck, from the start, by Euripides' attention to women and their psychology. We have seen powerful and fascinating women in Aeschylus and Sophocles—Clytemnestra, Cassandra, Antigone—but these characters are driven and one-dimensional, whereas Euripides' women (Medea, Andromache, Phaedra) are women in an historical situation, trying to cope, as we might say. This seems a clear case of Euripides wanting to bring everyday reality onto the stage? Am I right here? Or not?



## Aristophanes

**The dramatic imagination: comedy.** We are at a turning point in our review of Greek drama. We have spent three weeks on tragedy, and now are turning to a week on Aristophanes (455-385 B.C.), the premier Greek comedian. Are we still dealing with the same dramatic imagination we introduced with Aeschylus?

Yes and no. We are still dealing with public performances, held at major religious festivals in Athens, in the Theater of Dionysus. The same intense competition for prizes, the same lively and personally involved audience. But from the first glance we note a change in the kinds of theme presented. With Aristophanes we find no mythical titles, no actions based on 'slices from Homer's feast,' and total involvement with contemporary issues—the folly of war, the vagaries of the legal system in Athens, the mundane dimensions of rivalries between competing dramatic poets, the practice of 'selling wisdom' in public (the practice imputed to the Sophists.) We have seen dramatists concerned with 'actual events'—*The Persians* of Aeschylus, for example---or with contemporarily relevant events—the practice of Euripides—but with Aristophanes and Greek comedy we see the veil of the mythical totally stripped away. You may want to pursue the historical background of this genre difference, which will take you into theories of the kinds of dance festival tragedy and comedy split off from, in Archaic Greece. (That byway of historical investigation will bring you to the door of the satyr play, the 'extra play' the tragedian would insert into his trilogy as an entertainment, and in fact a conduit back into another kind of bumptious and erotic rural archaic past.) The secret to the peculiar *reality-driven* character of Greek comedy may lie hidden in the archaic roots of the genre.

**Is the comic drama 'conservative'?** Yes. Another trait of Greek comedy is implicit in the historical suggestions of the previous paragraph. Comedy, while dealing with the foibles of the real present, works from a position of assured value, generally the rightness of the old ways, and sees the present as falling away 'comically' from the standard occupied by the comedian: who believes in old fashioned wisdom, the traditional dispensation of justice, the dignity of the creative artist as derived from the Homeric model. Greek comedy, like comedy in general, looks down from a confident view point. How else can you mock?

**The Clouds** (423 B.C.) takes aim at precisely the 'public selling of wisdom, or argumentative skill,' of which the Sophists were accused. In fact Socrates, who was in no way guilty of such 'public selling,' is the butt of the joke in this drama about an ambitious farmer, whose son has racked up a huge debt, and whose dad is facing an angry law court. The son is sent to Socrates' 'Thinkery,' a thought-house where one learns not only to forget about the traditional values of the Athenians, but how to trick the law courts, and pull the wool over juries' eyes. The ensuing turmoil is hilarious, but not innocuous, for in fact the bias against Socrates, which we see the results of in Plato's *Apology*, is being established right here in this play, written a quarter century before Socrates' death. There could be no more compelling argument, that comedy bites hard into the social fabric—in contrast to tragedy, which generates discoveries in mythical outreach.

**Lysistrata** (411 B.C.). The downward spiral of Athenian political life, toward the end of the exhausting Peloponnesian War, the growing influence of women in social life, and the delights of bawdy sex: all these conditions converge to support this hilarious/biting comedy. Basically, the women of Athens are fed up with war, and with male ineptitude, and in a series of moves take over the Acropolis, the sacred center of Athens, and read the riot act to their husbands. No sex until the war ends. The way this torture plays out is as phallic and uproarious as Athenian public amusement could be, joining serious points to outrageous fantasies.

**The Frogs** (405 B.C.). Dionysus, the god of the theater for the Athenians, is disgusted at the low quality of dramatic presentations in Athens, Sophocles and Euripides having died the previous year. He decides to descend into Hades and to bring back Euripides, his favorite poet. However when Dionysus arrives in the underworld he finds himself in the midst of hubbub and a literary duel between Euripides and Aeschylus, over which is the better poet. In the end Dionysus returns from Hades with Aeschylus, but what brings down the house is not that outcome, but the subtle/raucous debate, between Euripides and Aeschylus, over which is the better poet. It is this debate that I stress, *the subtleties of literary points aired to a delighted citizen audience!*

### *Reading*

*Four Plays by Aristophanes: The Clouds, The Birds, Lysistrata, The Frogs*; translated by Arrowsmith, Lattimore, Parker (New York, 19943). (Why not read all four plays?)

### *Discussion*

Are you too amazed that Aristophanes (in *The Frogs*) can display, in the highest spirits and to the evident delight of his audience, debates on subtle literary points, illustrations of this or that great tragedian's stylistic skills or foibles? Does this not imply a literate audience, and one for which the experience of the theater is a central entertainment? Have we any similar collective experience in modern cultures? What about televised national sports events? As for the theater itself, has it lost its central power, in the Industrialized West?

## Herodotus

**Herodotus The Father of History (490-425 B.C).** Herodotus wrote the first significant history of Greece and of his travels both in Greece and in other parts of the Eastern Mediterranean. Is he the father of history or, as some ancient critics claimed, 'the father of lies'? (Or, as more than one wit has queried, are history and lies the same?)

**The historical imagination.** Our class is in Greek literature. We have divided our material into five sections according to the kind of imagination dominant in each: *epic*, *lyric*, *philosophy*, *drama*, and now *history*. By contemporary standards it might seem that epic, lyric, and drama clearly belong to the literary imagination, while questions could be raised about philosophy and history. I hope that we quelled such doubts about 'philosophy,' by showing that it rose from an inquiry tradition seeking the central meaning of reality, and that right through Socrates and Plato Greek philosophy belonged to a restless inquiry distinctively targeting both the nature of physical reality and then, at its peak, the nature of ethical relationships, knowledge, and logic. Is not this kind of inquiry a close kin to the kind of 'address to the world' fundamental to epic, lyric, and drama, all of which propose, and observe, models of the world we live in? And is not history, at least in the Hellenic sense, just such an inquiry? The Greek verb *historeo*, *I inquire*, lies at the root of the word 'historia,' and while today, among scholars of history, there may be fierce debate about whether history is a science or simply a special kind of language, there is no doubt that for the Greeks of Herodotus' time history was just one more offspring of the Muses. Clio, after all, was the Muse of History, and took her place beside her sisters, all of them wellheads of the arts.

**What kind of history does Herodotus write?** The underlying purpose of Herodotus' work is to create a history of his time, with an end point at the Battles of Marathon (490 B.C.) and Salamis (480 B.C), that is at the point where the Greeks triumph over the vast Persian Empire. To achieve that historization of his own time Herodotus concentrates on the peripeties of the Persian monarchy from the time of Cyrus in the mid-sixth century to that of King Xerxes whose fleet the Greeks defeat at Salamis.

In constructing his history Herodotus digresses constantly—he declares that digression is his plan—drawing on his own extensive travels in the Near East and Egypt, on travellers' tales, and on earlier Greek world historians, like Hecataios. While his digressions are never pointless, and are almost always amusing, they contribute only indirectly to the construction of his overall history. It will be well to look at a sample of Herodotus' historical thinking.

**How Herodotus thinks as an historian.** We need to consider the kind of mind work Herodotus carries out, in presenting a history. Take the story of Gyges and Candaules. (Book One, the beginning.) What does the telling of that story have to do with furthering Herodotus' history timeline? Start with this. Herodotus wants to locate King Croesus of Lydia in terms of his own lineage. Why? To construct the true architecture of known time. And why Croesus? Because Croesus is the King who, by capturing and subduing Greek city states in Asia Minor, first generated conflict between the Greeks and their neighbors to the East. So how to present the line of descent that led from the first Lydian King, Candaules, 'down to' Croesus, more than a century later? The way Herodotus 'chooses'—in fact the thought movement congenial to him throughout his history—is to start by dramatizing the events that led to the kingly transition from the first Lydian monarch, Candaules, to his successor, Gyges. We are talking, of course, about the 'story' of Gyges and Candaules, which we are reading this week. Herodotus moves the timeline through 'episodes.'

**What do you think about this kind of historicizing?** The kind of story-writing history which Herodotus loves, is one way of building a time line. In a sense the tale of Gyges and Candaules is a 'date' on a list of time periods. In every sense of the word 'imagination' Herodotus is one with the other 'literary minds' who create ancient Greek culture.

### *Reading*

*Herodotus, The Histories, Revised*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (London, 2003.) (You should simply read as much as you can, starting at the beginning. Book One will give you a strong sense of the whole, and is the minimum required.)

### *Discussion*

Herodotus sets out to trace the development of the Persian monarchy, from its origins in the mid-sixth century to its defeat under Xerxes at the hands of the Greeks. Are you able to follow this underlying history through the maze of tales and reports that make up the bulk of the history? Does it seem important, to Herodotus, that you should keep the fundamental timeline study in mind?

Does Herodotus ever talk about himself? Or do you feel he reveals himself without talking about himself?

## Thucydides

**Who was Thucydides?** This observer of the grandeur and fall of the Athenians, during the second half of the fifth century, served as a general in the north of Greece, but apart from that evidence of his personal experience remains known almost solely for one book, his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. In that great work—some would say it, not Herodotus' *Histories*, was the first true History--Thucydides (middle fifth Century-399 B..C.) proved himself a drier, more analytical, more philosophical historian than his predecessor and on the whole admired model, Herodotus. Thucydides probes the causes and resolutions that created the Peloponnesian War—up to the year 411 B.C.-- in the last thirty years of the fifth century. He writes his history largely by means of constructed (remembered, reported) speeches, by a careful sifting of evidence—in conscious difference from Herodotus, who, as we have seen, was often considered the 'father of lies'—and by sticking closely to his topic, unlike Herodotus, who was the master of the digression which fitted into his plan. And Thucydides develops a narrative style, as well as a view of mankind, which makes him a true cross between the epic creator and a seasoned and relatively pessimistic judge of human affairs.

**How does Thucydides establish a history?** Thucydides creates his history out of defined vignettes in which events of the Peloponnesian war are cameod, usually with little, or very spare, commentary from the author. (As a participant general in the army of Athens, Thucydides sticks to the detail of military affairs, and—in this like Herodotus, too—makes almost no reference to himself, with the exception of a famed reference, in the third person, to a certain Thucydides who 'fought in the north.')

**The Melian debate.** After the debacle of the Sicilian Expedition, in 415 B.C., the Athenians decided to add to their Aegean possessions, and proposed a takeover of the small island of Melos, which had so far maintained a neutral posture in the Peloponnesian War, despite historical ties to Sparta. It will be worth your while to examine Thucydides' account of the debate between the Athenian envoys to the Melians, and the leading Melians who are chosen to discuss the Athenian proposals. (By this time the Athenians and their island allies have already been ravaging the island of Melos; their debate proposal is strictly from power.) The dry reliance on force, which the Athenian representative displays, is 'brilliant':

*Melian:* 'But must we be your enemies? Would you not receive us as friends if we are neutral and remain at peace with you?'

*Athenian:* 'No, your enmity does not injure us as much as your friendship; for your enmity is in the eyes of our subjects a demonstration of our power, your friendship of our weakness.'

Never has *Machtpolitik* been so simply and clearly dissected. And so goes the description of the Melian episode, the interlocutors reduced to namelessness by Thucydides—not his usual practice—and the ruthless determination of the Athenians screwed tighter and tighter, but in the coldest possible language of diplomacy. It is no wonder that many 'modern historians' have turned back to Homer, for the model of the Thucydidean historian: as you will have seen, the *Iliad* is full of formally expressive delegations, carefully crafted hard-talk, and brutal resolutions. It hardly needs to be said that, at the end of the Melian debate, the Melian males were slaughtered and the women and children sold into slavery.

**The Funeral Oration of Pericles.** It being the custom in Athens that the elected leader of the Athenians should provide an oration for the military dead, each year, Pericles undertook this challenge after the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War (431 B.C.). At that

time Athens seemed manifestly in control of military affairs in Greece; the Long Walls were strong protection against invasion, trade was strong, culture was at its peak: men had been killed, of course, but it was time to frame those deaths fittingly. You will want to contrast the tone of Pericles—as Thucydides recreates it—with the tone of the Athenian representative at Melos; cold, logical, crushing. The mastery of such tone differences is the mark of Thucydides' brilliant inner ear for the sounds of history, and the true indicator of his allegiance to the tradition of epic narrative in Greece.

### *Reading*

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### *Discussion*

From the viewpoint of our focus, on types of imagination in Greek literature, the key question is: is Thucydides part of the epic or of the historical tradition? He memorializes, like a historian, but he does so (like Herodotus) in vignettes which are like 'scenes in a play,' often involving dialogue, and usually providing opposing sides of a given argument. His language is artful, strict, perceptive, hiding the person of its narrator but sensitive to the nuances of style that constitute character in language. An historian? An epic poet?

*Are you happy with the analysis of Greek literature in terms of types of imagination? Do you see a genuine connection among the five types of imagination we isolated?*

*Aristotle commented that poetry is more philosophical than history, because poetry is concerned with what might have been rather than with what was. Was he right?*

*The chorus is arguably the heart of the Greek drama, although we have given most of our attention to plot and content. What was the overriding importance of the chorus? What crucial roles did it play in shaping a drama?*

*Despite the sharp differences, between the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides, do you think they converge in their use of short stories and vignettes to move the timeline along?*

*To call a play a tragedy is a strong statement. Do you find Greek tragedies 'tragic'? Or are they—or some of them—exalting and uplifting?*

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HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

# ANCIENT GREEK LITERATURE

An Online Guide to Ancient Greek Literature

## **Description**

*History of Ancient Greek Literature* explores the major forms of ancient Greek literature: epic, history, drama, satire, lyric, philosophy. We will profile some of the key issues and authors of each period, characterize the period as a whole, and sprinkle enlivening quotes through the whole. Each period/section opens with an overview which places the events of the period in their cultural and historical context.

## **About the Author**

This Literary History Guide was developed by Frederic Will, Ph.D., School of Advanced Studies, University of Phoenix. Professor Will has written extensively on Greco-Roman cultures.

## Introduction to the Online Guide to Ancient Greek Literature

The following ebook is a chronologically based introduction and guidebook to Ancient Greek Literature. In seventy-five units, divided into five time periods, we will present snapshots of the development of Greek literary culture, from the earliest stages before 1000 B.C. through the time of Diogenes Laertius, in the 3rd century after Christ. We will thus stick to the chronological—for explanation by causes and results plays an important role in understanding Greek literature—but with each period we will organize our material by genres—*poetry, philosophy, history, oratory*, etc.—because in the end it was decisive, to the achievement of the Greeks in literature, that at any one time they expressed themselves in a number of contemporary genres. We will, by the conclusion of the survey, be able to track glimpses of thematic unity in this body of written work, from Homer through the fifth century, from there to the end of the Peloponnesian War (401 B.C.), to the period of Plato and Aristotle (second half of the fourth century B.C.), the Alexandrian period (third century B.C.) and finally to the writings of Greek language authors under the Romans (second to first centuries B.C.)

While ancient Greek literature as a whole will be the topic of these brief entries, we will devote more than half of our selections to the early period—from Homer to the early 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.. We will in fact focus our attention on the achievements of the Athenian *polis*, which was in the fifth century small, and relatively homogeneous, though composed of deeply individual actors, and of a unique communal fervor. (Though, as we have to keep reminding ourselves, women, slaves, and foreigners were then excluded from citizenship or the vote.) We will stress Athens itself, at least in the early period through the fourth century and Plato; though that is not to minimize the importance of Asia Minor and the Greek islands throughout the development of Greek literature. After that time, from say 350 B.C. on, we will pay considerable attention to the wider development of the ancient literary world and of Greek itself, which became a world language in the time of Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.), ultimately offering its services to the origins of Christianity and continuing intact through the Middle Ages into a vigorous explosion of modern literature, after the Greek War of Independence in the 1820's.

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*Period One The Heroic Period (1000 B.C.—750 B.C.)*

*EPIC*

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## Early epic poetry

The Greek epic launches with the genius of Homer. We are still not certain of the identity of this creator, or whether he composed in writing or orally, but we know that in the late eighth century B.C. a version of his oral works, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was *written down* in Athens. This version is sometimes referred to as the Pisistratean recension, for it was completed in the reign of Peisistratus—and marks in writing the two greatest milestones in Greek literature. It was not, of course, that this creation emerged out of the blue, for in fact Archaic Greek culture had by 700 B.C. been developing for at least a millennium on the Greek mainland, and there had long been a rich oral epic tradition in northern areas of what would later become Greece. And that is only a short sighted view of the epic tradition that was 'behind' Homer. Behind the Greek epic tradition was a mighty volume of Ancient Near Eastern epic texts, many of them lost in the sands of the Middle East, which included such masterworks as the Babylonian Creation Story (*Enuma Elish*) or *Gilgamesh*, a literary exploration of fundamental human themes—immortality, lust, personal integrity-- composed one millennium before Homer's work. That Mesopotamian background clearly empowered the epic imagination which grew into Homer from the various culture- creative people who occupied the Ancient Near East. *Language development* was another factor in making the Greek epic imagination effective. The great ancient epics were originally created by massive feats of oral memory, but by the time of the Pisistratean 'recension,' putting these texts together in the late eighth century, an elegant and efficient alphabetic system, like the Greek, was available and had been found invaluable for communication. The development of that code system, out of an ancient history leading through cuneiform and hieroglyphic traditions, eventually into a Phoenician waystage, required millennia of experiment and ingenuity. Even a native genius like Homer was dependent on the tireless creative efforts of his language making predecessors.

**Homer** (8<sup>th</sup> Cent. B.C.)

**The story of the *Iliad*.** We open with arguably the greater of Homer's two works, the *Iliad*, or the epic about the 'Fall of Troy.' The historic 'Fall'—traditionally located by the Greeks as from the twelfth cent. B.C.—brought together a set of local Greek power lords and retainers, whose interest was in the wealth and shipping control of Troy itself, strategically located on the shores of the Bosphorus. A myth, which dominates Homer's account of the Greek commercial/military venture, holds that Alexander, the son of the King of Troy, stole Helen, the glamorous wife of the Greek warlord Menelaus, and carried her off to Troy as his love-toy. The story of the subsequent Greek expedition against Troy, and the defeat of the city and its rulers, would by this myth be a byproduct of commercial adventure; only by Homer's vision transmuted into a powerful story of action, military courage and brutality, sexual passion, and ultimately regions of self-sacrifice that touch the lives of all of us. The *Iliad* can be read as pure absorbing fiction in dactylic hexameters, or as an account of the historical movement of peoples in the mid-second millennium, an account referring back to an event six to eight hundred years earlier than Homer's own time, or, finally—and this is what keeps the tale alive—a story of military adventure, moody and desperate leaders, brutal enemies, and on a rare occasion a challenge—like that to Achilles at the end—to go beyond the self into an act of grace.

**The hexameter.** The unique importance of this metrical line, in carrying and shaping the entire epic tradition, merits special attention here. We can trace the hexameter wherever the epic appears in Greece, all the way to Apollonius Rhodius (#70). The dactylic hexameter is a long epic line, typically broken in two parts, which served as the vehicle of Homer's creation. The hexameter is a line of six cola—six metrical units—of which the basic foot is long/short/short, where length refers to length of time required to produce the syllable in question. We are to imagine the epic typically performed to the strumming of the lyre, and by a highly experienced professional, who measured his success by the muscular acclaim of his all male upper class warrior audiences.

**The story of the *Odyssey*.** Among the Greek warriors at Troy were many leaders who felt themselves aggrieved by the 'rape of Helen,' or the 'rape of their commercial vigor,' however the loss is described. Among these independent warriors was Odysseus, lord of the manor on the island of Ithaca. As a supporter of Agamemnon, the overall head of the Greek expedition, Odysseus was a team player, until Troy fell; but after that Fall—once again the date given by the Greeks to the event was the twelfth century B.C., the Bronze Age—the Greek warriors dispersed, heading back toward their homeland and local communities. In the accounts of this return Homer collects memories lodged deep in the Greek folk memory, recollections of periods of naval adventure, seafaring trade, and commercial rivalry; Homer blends these memories into a coherent whole around the half-'real' half-fictive adventures of a warrior whose courage, sense of irony, and passionate life-love have made him for subsequent world literature a brilliant symbol. You will see, as you follow the narrative of *The Odyssey*, that Homer exposes this fictive personage—whose name Odysseus means 'the angry one'—to trials which bring out his character, and with it the salient value traits of the Bronze Age Greek world.

Without spoiling the text by retelling stories here, we may draw your attention to a kind of dimension, prevalent in the *Odyssey*—also in the *Iliad*—which is behind the universal greatness of this text. Odysseus is at one point a guest in the kingdom of the Phaeacians, an idyllic culture given to dance and music and the gentle life; he has just survived a harrowing battle with the waves at sea. Seated next to the King, at a vast board of victuals,



Odysseus is delighted to hear the bard—for there was always musical entertainment at grandee feasts—recount the details of a hero's wandering, a hero who turns out, as the song proceeds, to be Odysseus himself. The reader/hearer of the epic thrills to the dimensionality of the text, where Homer winks at us across the character of Odysseus who is winking at us across the irony of listening in delighted silence to a validating tale of himself at sea, a tale which rescues the hero from all the anonymity of endurance on the fishy brine.

### **The epic cycle** (8<sup>th</sup> Cent. B.C.; compiled in Hellenistic times)

The epic tradition centered around the Trojan War, for that immense struggle and Greek victory loomed large in the minds of the Greeks of the classical period. (It still speaks to our imaginations today, on the big screen and in literature.) The performers of that Great War tradition were, we assume on good but little evidence, professional singers who learned the poems by heart—though doubtless playing with details as memory or current situation indicated—and recited them to musical accompaniment in the presence of warriors and local chiefs. The man on the street, of course, while not present at such grand performances, was deeply imbued with the vast world of historical tale—which formed after all not only the entertainment base for his personal pleasure, but compendia of mythology which linked into his fundamental beliefs. It is thus no surprise that there should have been more tales than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, to carry on the great tradition; and in fact the epic cycle, the *epikos kyklos*, seems to have been just that, expressive pieces of epic material that were adjacent to the material of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and that composed part of the whole corpus of the epic tradition.

Pieces, in fact, is just what the epic cycle now is. What remains to us are eight fragments of epics—taken off battered papyri, for the most part—which deal with episodes collateral to the tale Homer recounts: involving events which provoked the war, rapes and victimizations within the war, the details of the actual destruction of Troy, all apparently supplementing Homer's tales without overlapping them. The date of creation/construction/writing of this oral material is usually taken to be slightly later than that of the Pisistratean Recension; and the poetic creators of these cycle epics are customarily viewed by the ancient critics as *neoteroi* later than (and probably inferior to) Homer. That our knowledge of these works is as slight as this entry suggests, results from our dependence, for the little we know, on such references as that made in the Preface to the *Iliad* edited in Venice in the tenth century A.D. The very compilation of this relatively little known set of texts is probably datable to the first century B.C.; further evidence of how little we can truly claim to know about this work.

## The Homeric Hymns (7<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.)

This collection of thirty-three anonymous 'hymns' warrants mention by the historian Thucydides (#55) but apart from that seems to have been of no interest to classical Greek literature. That despite the fact that—admittedly the dating system requires guesswork—the earliest of these texts were probably written down near the time of the Peisistratean Recension, which involved the first 'fixing on papyrus' of the Homeric epics. (The very end of the seventh century B.C. seems a feasible date for the earliest of the hymns.)

The most ambitious of these hymns—which we have to imagine as parts of formal religious or athletic ceremonies—retell the great tales embodied in Greek mythology. In one of the major hymns, to Demeter, the 'bard' is tasked to unfold the ancient tale of Demeter, and the rape of her daughter, Persephone. (The tale was powerful to the Greeks because, as you know, it embodied the drama of the return of the flowers and crops during the six months of the year when Persephone was freed from her underworld rapist, Hades, and given freedom to be her creative self on earth.) In the following excerpt from the hymn, the Son of Hyperion, Apollo, consults with Demeter about the 'loss' of her daughter:

*So said she. And the Son of Hyperion (Apollo) answered her: 'Queen Demeter, daughter of rich-haired Rhea, I will tell you the truth; for I greatly reverence and pity you in your grief for your trim-ankled daughter. None other of the deathless gods is to blame, but only cloud-gathering Zeus who gave her to Hades, her father's brother, to be called his buxom wife. And Hades seized her and took her loudly crying in his chariot down to his realm of mist and gloom. Yet, goddess, cease your loud lament and keep not vain anger unrelentingly: Aidoneus, the Ruler of Many, is no unfitting husband among the deathless gods for your child, being your own brother and born of the same stock: also, for honour, he has that third share which he received when division was made at the first, and is appointed lord of those among whom he dwells.'*

**Hesiod** (7<sup>th</sup> Cent. B.C.)

**The epic poet as Muse possessed.** The *Iliad* opens with 'menin aeide thea'...'sing to me goddess of the wrath of....' while the *Odyssey* opens with 'andra moi ennepe, Mousa...' 'of that man sing to me, O muse....' But that initiatory formula is not the only pattern available to the Greek epic poet, though it is a pattern reminiscent of a culture world in which individualism is sharply subordinated to the codes of the whole culture. The epic poet Hesiod (seventh century B.C.), creating in the same formulaic hexameter as Homer, speaks to us as an *individual* voice with no pretensions to channeling inspiration. It is not that he has no higher pretensions, for in fact he believes the Muses have given him the power to 'sing the story of things, the future and the past,' but he is quite clear that he, a Boeotian herdsman and narrator from a wretched farmland near the village of Ascra, *has been given his power by the Muses*. The Muses do not sing through Hesiod, but empower *him* to sing.

**Import of Hesiod's epics.** What remains to us, from that empowerment, is two small epics, *The Works and Days* and the *Theogony*. The *Theogony* describes the origins of the universe out of chaos, the gradual power take-over by the Olympian gods, the struggles that pit Uranus against Cronos, and fitfully usher in the current interrelated pantheon of the Olympian gods. As you read this poem, which may seem arid in the way (to many of us today) we find the genealogical lineages in the first books of the Old Testament, you may want to reflect on the fruitfulness of this work for the growth of the first Greek philosophy, which will employ, in its search for a first principle (*arche*), the same kind of research thinking that generates Hesiod's *arche* of Chaos, his first principle, from which all else grew. But that fruitfulness is not the only cultural impact of Hesiod's work. He packs into this epic not only a mythography of the lineage of the gods, but he enriches his argument, that reason and justice on the whole, in the end, prevail, with a counter vision of the progressive decline of the state of mankind from an original Golden State to the condition of Bronze in which humanity currently finds itself.

**Historical Context of Works and Days.** Hesiod's *The Works and Days* narrates from his grudge against a brother who has dealt inequitably with him, and from there the small epic poem continues to discuss issues for the agricultural householder of the time: when to plant, when to plow, how to use the knowledge of the stars for sea travel, how to bend to the unavoidable dictates of fate. As these issues are discussed we are regularly reminded that the poem as a whole is an object lesson for brother Perses, who has defrauded Hesiod, and who has much to learn from hearing the following epic which accounts for the importance of thrift, honesty and hard work. The tenor of this poem is that of a Yankee farmer writing in formal hexameter lines, bowing his head—as do all farmers—to the fate the environment provides them, and writing with sustained fealty to the plans of the gods. We can hardly imagine a perspective less Homeric, less regally formulated. The binding perspective is captured in two sets of tales which seem to speak from Hesiod's heart. One is the tale that includes Prometheus and Pandora, and fixes on the fate of idle curiosity, as well as the fate of defying the Gods. Don't go there, man, he says. Then there is the thematic of the Five Ages, the tale of the gradual degeneration from gold to iron, which symbolizes the broken world Hesiod belongs to. The hexameter is the only force that binds Homer to Hesiod, part of a distinctive genre for seeing the world.

In the following, a hawk, about to consume a small bird, expresses his view of the role of kingship versus the little guy in Hesiod's society.

*You fool, why do you scream? Someone much your better has you.  
You go wherever I conduct you, songstress though you may be.  
I shall make you my dinner, if I wish, or let you go.  
Senseless is he who wishes to set himself against his betters:  
he lacks victory and suffers grief upon grief.*

*Period Two The Archaic Period*

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## Lyric imagination and its historical setting

In the present section we return to the so-called Archaic stage of Greek culture, when the establishment of Homeric poetry in writing was already a fact, the spread of literacy, writing, and accordingly individualism was starting to make itself felt, and the economic and social structures of the fifth century B.C. polis were anticipated on the horizon. Archilochus (seventh century B.C.) and Sappho (late seventh--middle sixth century B.C.) will be among our guides into this transitional world, and into the world of lyric expression, which is the surest indicator of social and cultural change. But there will be many more poets to guide us into this period, for in fact we are stepping into a uniquely fertile era for Hellenic self-expression. We are, 'suddenly,' face to face with distinctive and passionate *individuals*, and though they are addressing us in meters as formalized as those of the epic hexameter, these individuals are not channeled by the Muse, but are in some regards clearly exposed to us.

The present point is complex, and unfolds into one of the mysteries of the Hellenic achievement. Archilochus, for instance, tells us about his love for Neoboule, his casting away a spear in battle, the experience of an eclipse. We incline to take these professions at face value, and in some cases—like that of the eclipse—it seems plausible to stick with face value. But, as the French poet Mallarmé was to say, two and a half millennia later, 'a poem is made of words' and the poet's first responsibility is to words, the way they fit together, their sounds—to *those* kinds of honesty. 'We must be on guard, when we draw conclusions about matters of fact, from verbal artifacts—especially from those composed 'long ago.'

Whatever the driver of the lyric, and however complex the lyricist, it will strike us all that there was a veritable explosion of this kind of self-expression in the Archaic Age. It is as though a hunger for fresh verse forms was asserting itself throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.

## **Archilochus** (7<sup>th</sup> Cent. B.C.)

**Archilochos as lyric presence.** We have stressed the importance of the dactylic hexameter (in Homer and Hesiod). With Archilochos (and the other lyric poets we discuss here) we come into a pluralistic metrical world, in which, though there is 'direct expression' of the individual, there are multiple prosodic vehicles for that expression: the *iambic* meter (often, in Archilochos, used for 'attack' or 'invective' poetry); and various lyric meters, declarative (*trochaics*), *anapestic* (tripping and springing), and *dactylic*, an echo from the epic.

**Archilochos and the remains of his work.** We know one date in Archilochos' life, 648 B.C., the occasion of a total eclipse of the sun over the Aegaeon: 'Nothing in the world can surprise me now....for Zeus, father of the Olympians, has turned midday into black night by shielding light from the blossoming sun, and now dark terror hangs over mankind...' Apart from that event, what we know of Archilochos comes from his own poems—and in that he hardly differed from the Athenians of the fifth century; their lives have largely to be reconstructed by much later comments from others, often embedded in texts/papyri reduced to a line or two. The evidence we deduce from Archilochos' poems suggests he was a mercenary soldier, that on one occasion he had thrown away his shield and fled from battle, that he had a great love for Neoboule (not 'romance'), that he preferred short tough individualistic fighting men to aristocratic pretty boys, and so on: from his remaining poems and fragments we can create the profile of a Thasian fighting man with such and such traits. Yet as we are looking at the lyric of personal expression, here, we had better take a sharp look. It is true that, in his lyrics which are mostly incomplete, Archilochos gives us content-lines which purport to be autobiographical glimpses, but self-expression in the lyric is not that transparent. The reliability of information given in a lyric is always open to question, and must be read in terms of the speaker and the tone of the whole piece. In most cases, if we look closely at the ancient lyric, we will find many reasons to question how it is personally revelatory. Finally, what do you think you can learn about a man from a little poem like the following?

*The fox knows many tricks, the hedgehog only one.  
One good one.*



## **Solon** ( 638 B.C.-558 B.C.)

The outburst of fine lyric, in the thawing Archaic Age of Greece, largely took place outside Athens: on the Asia Minor coast, on the Greek islands—Lesbos and Paros, in the cases of Sappho and Archilochos—while Athens remained behind in this development. It was the Athenian victory over Megara, for possession of Salamis, that brought Solon and the Athenian lyric to the fore. In 590 Solon was appointed Chief Magistrate for the year, in Athens, and tasked to bring harmony between the rival social groups—rich and poor—whose mutual hostility threatened to break out into Civil War. Solon describes his efforts, to pursue this policy, in largely grave and self-reflective iambs—again regular and organized in pattern—and in a discursive style which foreshadows the dialogue of characters in Greek tragedy a century later. For the range in Solon, consider the following:

*This man Solon is a shallow thinker and a fool;  
for the gods give him great goods, but he does not take them.  
He throws a great net around his prey, but then does not draw it in,  
He has neither good sense nor the will to use it.  
If I came to power, I'd grab all I could,  
tyrannizing the Athenians if even for one day only,  
even if I and my family were later to be flayed into a wineskin.*

Self-reflective irony of this stripe is rare in earlier Greek poetry. In the Homeric epic there is no room for authorial voice, let alone for self-irony, because the narrator is cloaked behind the vast verbal panoply he cedes to the Muse. Poets like Sappho and Archilochos display many ranges of subtle feeling, but they do not include reflection onto the voice expressing that feeling. Solon strikes a note that all of us today will recognize as a self-conscious, and more than a little self-critical, move. The development of irony was fitful and broken in ancient Greek culture. Odysseus, in Homer's *Odyssey*, reflects on himself, sometimes ironically, and tragic dramatists like Euripides create characters who reflect on themselves, but on the whole ancient Greek literature creates its clearest effects by direct and profound statement.

**Alcaeus** (Late 7<sup>th</sup> Cent. B.C.)

Alcaeus was from the North Aegean island of Lesbos, living in its capitol, Mytilene. He was from one the leading aristocratic families, and was deeply involved in the politics of the island, which was a powerful commercial and naval hub directly communicating with the Hellespont and Asia Minor, and for such reasons a direct competitor with Athens. (We are in that formative period of Greek democracy, when power was not yet predominately grounded in Athens; though the impetus given Athenian democracy by Solon, whom we just visited, was starting to drive history toward the Athenian polis.) Alcaeus' life, both as an active participant in island politics and as an exile, played directly into his lyrics, indeed into such lines as the historian Herodotus later recalls, in which Alcaeus is cited throwing away his shield in the midst of battle, so that he can come out unscathed. This incident, in fact, fits with the Alcaeus who pens such lines as the following drinking song:

*Let's drink! Why are we waiting for the lamps? Only an inch of daylight left.  
Lift down the large cups, my friends, the painted ones;  
for wine was given to men by the son of Semele and Zeus  
to help them forget their troubles. Mix one part of water to two of wine,  
pour it in up to the brim, and let one cup push the other along...*

The Lesbos where Alcaeus created brought him into direct contact with his age mate, Sappho, with whom he plausibly became acquainted at a poetry ceremony—intertwined with religious ritual—at which she was performing in Mytilene. He was struck with her beauty and grace, virtually a god-like being he thought and said in fragments, and shared with her not only friendship but distinctive metrical styles—the Alcaic and the Sapphic meters were used interchangeably by both poets. It is a measure of the sophistication of local states, in this period following upon the looser clan cultures of the epic period, that such a brilliant island culture developed its own distinctive styles and cultural postures. We are firmly launched on that developmental history of a Greek culture which is eminently fragmented into small political units, often conforming to the divisory landscape of a mainland/coastal/island diversity, thus of an area where inter-regional communication was difficult.

**Callinus** (ca. 650 B.C.)

Callinus, from Ephesus in Asia Minor, was a contemporary of Solon, and might be coupled with him in thought, as a fellow lyricist of public spirited vigor—and of course poetic skill. (As we proceed with this section of post-epic lyrics, which pressed for a hearing in the seventh and sixth centuries, you will be noting how deeply this movement tracks the course of change in Greek society. Whereas the epic world, clannish and local, for centuries turned around prowess and wealth—as well as the grand outwardliness of the epic tradition—the lyric age, which sets in roughly on the heels of the Peisistratean Recension, and the ‘outing’ of Homer into print, battens on the new communal values of the early polis, with its increasing freedoms of expression, its receptiveness to individual moods and tones, and its stimulus to public artistic competitions.) Like Solon—and Alcaeus and Tyrtaeus (# 16)—Callinus seems to have been martial in spirit, and happy to contribute his work to the defence of his own community. Like Alcaeus and Sappho he created a signature meter—the elegiac couplet.

The following—in a version patched together from broken papyri—are a few lines from the longest whole version of a Callinus poem:

*With no thought of retreat, with no terror confessed,  
Hurl your last dart in dying, or strike your last blow.  
Oh, 't is noble and glorious to fight for our all,--  
For our country, our children, the wife of our love!  
Death comes not the sooner; no soldier shall fall,  
Ere his thread is spun out by the sisters above.*

The translation is dated, but the thrust of the sentiment is clear. Little seems left to explain, and yet there is everything yet to discuss, about the tone the poet establishes. The ‘thread’ that is ‘spun out’ is that measuring thread to which each of our lives is attached, and which is at the mercy of the Three Fates, the three Sisters who snip off our life lines at their whim or will. The concepts themselves, the ‘noble’ and the ‘glorious,’ are thin counterparts of the Greek *time* and *aglaon*. *Time* is the meaning-encrusted code word for the entire honor system of the warrior, while *aglaon*, which means essentially ‘bright’ and ‘glowing,’ has a metaphorical richness not easily reached with a faded English word like ‘glorious.’

**Anacreon** (582 B.C.-485 B.C.)

Anacreon was born in Teos, in Asia Minor, to a prosperous family. At a young age he was forced to flee to Thrace, in Northern Greece, for his community was brought under heavy pressure from the advances of the Persian ruler, Cyrus. (Such incursions from the Persians were already common among the Greeks in Asia Minor, many decades before the actual Persian Wars would begin.) In Thrace the refugees from Teos founded what was to be an important city, Abdera. While growing up in Abdera Anacreon became to polish his precocious poetic skills, which included lyre performances as well as skilled metrics with his own tweak, later called *anacreontics*; he wrote exclusively in the ancient Ionian dialect. From Abdera Anacreon was summoned to the court of Polycrates on the island of Samos, where he shone as a brilliant light of the King's sophisticated entourage. (Anacreon performed his best work in the setting of a court, where his capacity to bring forth subtle and desired praise of the royal was appreciated and remunerated. ) From Samos Anacreon was invited to Athens, where the ruler Hipparchus reigned at the center of a talented group of artists, among whom the poet Simonides, whom Anacreon came to know. Ultimately, in the course of a long life, Anacreon returned to Teos, where he was buried, leaving behind him a legacy of elegant poems of which some, not all, were of *the eat, drink, and be merry* sort.

The reputation of Anacreon for high living was probably quite wrong—look at his lifespan!—and in fact, though he dealt with a vigorous love of life, he hated nothing more than debauchery, which he excoriated as a barbarian vice. He remains truly Greek in this respect.

*Horns to bulls wise Nature lends;  
Horses she with hoofs defends;  
Hares with nimble feet relieves;  
Dreadful teeth to lions gives;  
Fishes learn through streams to slide;  
Birds through yielding air to glide;  
Men with courage she supplies;  
But to women these denies.  
What then gives she? Beauty, this  
Both their arms and armor is:  
She, that can this weapon use,  
Fire and sword with ease subdues.*

**Alcman** (seventh century B.C.)

Alcman carries a foggy biography with him. In many references—these are the papyrus fragments or later Greek scholia (references to authors which are typically about other topics)—he is said to have been from Sardis, in Lydia, in Asia Minor. (Sardis was a sophisticated city, known for its wealth and culture.) Alcman is also claimed by Sparta, and the dialect of his poetry supports that claim. (On such slim threads hang the identities we can reconstruct for ancient Greek literary figures.)

What we know of Alcman's poetry is typically a tale of loss: we know that there were six books of Alcman's choral poetry—poetry written for dancing and reciting teams—which were themselves lost at the beginning of the Middle Ages, but then that new work of Alcman was discovered in a tomb near the second Pyramid of Saqqara in Egypt, in 1855. (Chance discoveries like this continue to intertwine the findings of archeology with the history of achievements in the arts.) From that papyrus we inherit, though in battered and fragmentary state, one hundred lines of a *partheneion* of Alcman; a choral dance poem written for unmarried young women. The following is a sample of the not easily graspable energy of this poetry:

*There is such a thing as the vengeance of the gods:  
That man is blessed who devoutly weaves to the  
End the web of his day unweeping.  
And so I sing of the brightness of Agido; I see her  
Like the sun, which Agido summons to shine on us as  
Our witness.*

Who Agido was we don't know, but that this maiden dance song belongs to a tradition of harvest-promoting and broadly generative cult themes we have some reason to believe. Throughout these poems of Alcman, which originally included a great many 'hymns,' we find implications of homoeroticism, and in contexts where the fertility of the land seems to be implicated as well as human desires. We have no reason to doubt that this was the larger ritual framework, into which the eroticism of the early Greek lyric fitted. Eros was, and remained, for the Greeks a relational force, bringing together individuals but also the forces of fertility in the world at large.

## **Tyrtaeus** (mid seventh century B.C.)

Tyrtaeus represented the militant voice of his polis, Sparta. The fragments of his work—one is below—exhort his fellow citizens to plunge into the fray, and protect their community. (We are in the early stages of the formation of the severe Spartan ethos, which was to become so instrumental to the warfare and conflicts of the fifth century classical period. In its archaic inception the finesse of Spartan culture lay in its excellence of handiworks, metallic art, clothing, but—as we see with Tyrtaeus—the pressure of military conflict began quickly to transform the ethos of the polis.) Among the few details we know, of Tyrtaeus' life, is that he was viewed as the writer of a Constitution for Sparta (the *Eunomia*), which quite naturally he composed in elegiacs, dactylic lines (as in Homer) divided up into couplets. Like Solon, Tyrtaeus was a public figure committed to the interests of the polis.

*Let a man learn how to fight by first daring to perform mighty deeds,  
Not where the missiles won't reach, if he is armed with a shield,  
But getting in close where fighting is hand to hand, inflicting a wound  
With his long spear or his sword, taking the enemy's life,  
With his foot planted alongside a foot and his shield pressed against shield,  
And his crest up against crest and his helm up against helm  
And breast against breast, embroiled in the action—let him fight man to man,  
Holding secure in his grasp haft of his sword or his spear!*

This relatively intact poem replicates in its syntax the ferocity of hand to hand fighting, as the Greeks knew it. In the last four lines there are five noun repetitions calculated to enforce the clash of the referents—*foot, shield, crest, helm, breast*—against one another. The patterns of sounds reinforce the entire point of the poem.

Like Archilochus, Tyrtaeus writes of the military experience, and does so in carefully crafted poetry. This is remarkably Ancient Greek. We can imagine a military person, today, who writes wonderful poetry, but it is hard to imagine such a person incorporating into that poetry the experience of actual military action.

**Mimnermus** (fl. 630-600 B.C.)

Mimnermus was born in either Colophon or Smyrna, in Asia Minor, but beyond that fact nothing firm is clear about his life. What we know of his work is scattered in fragments, though a couple of wholes remain; we know that he was admired in ancient tradition as one of the greatest lyric poets. (The eminent British classicist, Sir Maurice Bowra, considered Mimnermus and Archilochos the most talented ears in the Greek lyric corpus.) We are clear that Mimnermus preferred short poems, frequently tailored thematically for drinking parties, and that the jewel like perfection of these poems exercised a strong influence on the Hellenistic Greek poet, Callimachus (#67), as well as on the Roman lyricist Propertius. The fact is, it seems that Mimnermus' poems were not—just as Anacreon's poems were not—clarion cries to the hedonist in each of us. Mimnermus is too subtle for that, and, as in the poem below, is careful to define the kind of hedonism he values—a hedonism free of the aches and pains of old age, a longing for bodily health, a longing which the poet Solon criticizes as cowardly. And yet it is not to be forgotten that Mimnermus lived in an age when the sexual could be addressed head on; witness, in his case, a poem which works through thematic variations on the proverbial notion that 'a lame man makes the best lover.'

*What is life, what is sweet, if it is missing golden [Aphrodite](#)?  
Death would be better by far than to live with no time for  
Amorous assignations and the gift of tenderness and bedrooms,  
All of those things that give youth all of its coveted bloom,  
Both for men and for women. But when there arrives the vexatiousness  
Of old age, even good looks alter to unsightliness  
And the heart wears away under the endlessness of its anxieties:  
There is no joy anymore then in the light of the sun;  
In children there is found hate and in women there is found no respect.  
So difficult has old age been made for us all by God!*

## **Sappho** (630 B.C.-570 B.C.)

**Sappho and her work.** Like Archilochos, Sappho is hard to reconstruct. (Here, even in the midst of the first expressions of personal feeling in Greek culture, the job of rediscovering whole identities behind the mask is almost impossible.) We get the general picture, from the numerous remaining pieces of her intricate lyrics. If we can take our texts at face value, we presume that Sappho was a lady of distinguished rank, living a privileged life on the island of Lesbos, and that she was a member of a coterie of sophisticated female peers, with whom she shares strong passions—perhaps in the setting of the awaiting of marriages, which will separate them. Hence, much longing, much concern about loss, much delicate feeling interwoven with the metrical form we call Sapphic. The rest, as they say, is pure poetry, standard setting for all time, and untranslatable. And yet we try, as did the American poet and classicist Richmond Lattimore, who boldly tackles the Sapphic stanza form:

*Like the very gods in my sight is he who  
sits where he can look in your eyes, who listens  
close to you, to hear the soft voice, its sweetness  
murmur in love and*

*laughter, all for him. But it breaks my spirit;  
underneath my breast all the heart is shaken.  
let me only glance where you are, the voice dies,  
I can say nothing,*

*but my lips are stricken to silence, under-  
neath my skin the tenuous flame suffuses;  
nothing shows in front of my eyes, my ears are  
muted in thunder.*

Rarely has passion been so sharply etched in lyric poetry, and we have to attribute part of the power, here, to the displacement of the impact of the loved one's beauty onto a third party, who can endure such beauty. Literary strategy is never far removed from Sappho's passions.

It is interesting to add, to this tidbit on a woman of great poetic power, that she has been captured by contemporary culture, for the sensational value of her 'Lesbian' life. The fact is, say scholars familiar with the social structures of Archaic Greece, that this lady was quite certainly on the path of marriage, and was taking a very customary path of bonding, as she presents herself in poetry, with age mates who were soon to be part of the heterosexual, and reproductive, mainstream.



### **Bacchylides** (524 B.C.-451 B.C.)

Bacchylides was born on the island of Ceos, in an environment of high Ionian culture, one more of those extraordinarily rich island cultures which generated the lyrics of, for instance, Archilochos and Sappho. He was born of a distinguished literary family—his uncle was the more famed poet, Simonides-- and Bacchylides traveled widely throughout the Aegean, competing in poetry contests, participating at poetry festivals. While he composed in many genres and prosodies, he was remarkably skilled at choral lyrics, which he offered up in dance competitions throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Like his chief rival, Pindar (#22), Bacchylides was invited by Hieron of Syracuse, in Sicily, to create praise poems for competitors in the famed horse races of the island. It was for this kind of contest that Bacchylides produced the vivid lyric below, in which the challenge is to find an appropriate way to honor Hieron the regent:

*...Quickly  
cutting the depth of air  
on high with tawny wings  
the eagle, messenger of Zeus  
who thunders in wide lordship,  
is bold, relying on his mighty  
strength, while other birds  
cower, shrill-voiced, in fear.  
The great earth's mountain peaks do not hold him back,  
nor the tireless sea's  
rough-tossing waves, but in  
the limitless expanse  
he guides his fine sleek plumage  
along the West Wind's breezes,  
manifest to men's sight.  
So now for me too countless paths extend in all directions  
by which to praise your [i.e. Hieron's] prowess...*

One notes above all the indirectness and sustained metaphorical power of the approach Bacchylides adopts, toward the celebration of Hieron.

We will shortly come to Pindar, the rival of Bacchylides, and comment on the style differences between the two poets. We can for the moment settle for noting that Bacchylides is an occasional writer, in the highest sense, praising on public occasions. That he is also more than that, a writer in many forms, only came to light in the late nineteenth century, when a packet of his poetry was discovered in Egypt, and overnight Bacchylides became a major figure in the lyric canon. So it often is, in the formation of literary fames in antiquity; a chance papyrus, by a newly discovered Egyptian pyramid, may well vault an obscure Greek poet into front honors.

**Simonides** (566-468 Cent. B.C.)

You will be reflecting, that the biographies, and indeed the broad historical settings, of the earliest Greek poets are hard to reconstruct in any detail. The fact is that the detail available is usually drawn from comments in later authors, often Hellenistic, or from Byzantine commentaries like the *Suda*, a tenth century A. D. Byzantine encyclopedia, or from papyrus fragments. It is from such sources that we 'know' of Simonides that he was not only an internationally prolific poet of choral dance songs—a specialty of the island of Ceos, where he was born—but a much sought after writer of epigrams, like the following supremely famous three liner attributed in the poem to the voice of the Spartan who fell defending his homeland against the Persians at the Battle of Thermopylae in 476 B.C.

Four thousand of us fought three million.  
When you visit Sparta, tell them:  
Here, the soldiers kept their word.

The terseness and valor of the words struggle to come through in English, but one gets the point. The ingenious author of such concise pieces was also known for a number of unusual achievements. He was apparently the first Greek lyric poet to charge for his creations, which could include preparing a dance troupe to perform his work. (The reverse of this fact is noteworthy; that for most of its history Greek literature was a public/social act, often intended for performance, but rarely commercialized.) He was later 'mythologized' as having been surpassingly wise, ingenious—he is said to have invented four new letters, which were accordingly added to the Greek alphabet, and to have devised a mnemotechnic system which was to be taken by the oral poets of antiquity as an invaluable aid in their memory-based creations. (In an oral or mixed oral/written culture the art of memorization and recital was essential.) It might finally be mentioned that Simonides was famed as a miser, one who—ironically?—insisted that money-making was the only pleasure that old age did not take away from him.

## Theognis (6<sup>th</sup> Cent. B.C.)

Of Theognis there is much and little to say. The much derives from the fact that an extraordinarily large amount of Theognis' work is preserved, more than that of any other Greek lyric poet of the archaic age; the little from the fact that with one exception we have trouble understanding the fundamental thrust of his work. That exception is this: Theognis is clearly a pessimist---see the evidence below--

*Best of all for mortal beings is never to have been born at all,  
Nor ever to have set eyes on the bright light of the sun.  
But, since he is born, a man should make utmost haste through the gates of Death  
And then repose, the earth piled into a mound round himself...*

and comes into that attitude from a particular historical setting. Though we are not sure where this poet was from—Megara, in Attica, seems the leading candidate—we know that his inherited world view was aristocratic, that he addressed many of his poems to an (unknown) Kyrnos, and that he deeply resented the incursions of class mixture and lower class values into the aristocratic social world he belonged to. In other words, he was clearly a disillusioned aristocrat, was deeply sensitized to the class struggle which everywhere marked that tendency in Archaic Greece—lying between the epic world and that of the 'democratic' polis—to break down accepted values. We also know, as we read between the lines of his elegiacs, that he was not averse to eugenic thinking:

In rams and asses and horses, Cynus, we seek the thoroughbred, and a man is concerned therein to get him offspring of good stock; yet in marriage a good man thinketh not twice of wedding the bad daughter of a bad sire if the father give him many possessions, nor doth a woman disdain the bed of a bad man if he be wealthy, but is fain rather to be rich than to be good. For 'tis possessions they prize; and a good man weddeth of bad stock and a bad man of good; race is confounded of riches and it is no surprise that of all later commentators on this poet it is Friedrich Nietzsche, the brilliant philosopher of race, who found Theognis most congenial.

**Pindar** (522 B.C.-443 B.C)

**The *Odes*.** Epic, in a sense, the vision of Pindar certainly is. This Theban poet (522-443 B.C.), born well over a century after the writings of Hesiod, and perhaps twice that since the 'Pisistratean recension' that recorded the works of Homer at the end of the eighth century, is in one sense the new individual of the Athenian fifth century, a distinctive stylist, a praiser of glory in the individualist games and races that focused the attention of his contemporaries, and yet at the same time a celebrant above all of the heroic commitment to excellence, and of the heroic male ideal underlying that commitment. The in-between position of Pindar is illustrated by the use he makes of myth in his poetry.

**The texts and performance of Pindar.** The remaining texts of Pindar have come to us from many manuscripts and palimpsests, and though what remains to us constitutes work carried out over a long period (498-444 B.C.), the totality of what is left is only a fragment of Pindar's huge 'output,' work firmly lodged in the age of writing and parchment replication, and continuously expanding through Pindar's life-role as an invited praiser-poet at games, races, and regal celebrations. (His work was largely occasional, and devoted to praising the *arête*/excellence of victors in contests; doing so for audiences of the educated and wealthy, who were the ones able both to support his creativity and to read and understand his difficult work.) It will not be a surprise, given this performative nature of Pindar's work, on-the-spot and admiring, that the language structures of that work differ profoundly from those required for Homer and Hesiod, who were (very differently from one another) retailing the epic perspective to audiences far removed from the events or ideas about which they were hearing.

**The conditions of production.** We have mentioned the dactylic hexameter as the vehicle of epic in its initial phase, but in Pindar we face a complex metrical world suited to the music and dance which (we gather) were the production-setting of Pindar's work. The melding of that distinctive metrical world with the thematics of a Pindaric ode represents a new societal world, in which not only were great tales told, but were told in a manner germane to a discursive and democratic society.

**First Olympian Ode of Pindar.** The language of this performance, first of all, is not based on a single kind of 'foot,' like the dactyl, but on a counterpoint of iambs with anapests. This counterpoint is distributed by a dance chorus according to the dance steps performed by the presenters of the ode, which is designed to celebrate the victory of Hiero's chariot in a major chariot race. (It is not the charioteer but the chariot owner who receives the praise here.) The distribution of the contrasting metrical patterns is coordinated with the moves of the dance—during which the ode in question is recited. Those moves are triadic, consisting of three different turns—*strophe* (meaning *turn*), *antistrophe* (meaning *a turn in the opposite direction*), and *epode*, a *stationary summative choral move* in which the tale being narrated/presented is advanced to a new theme.

**The Content of Pindar's First Olympian Ode.** In the case of Pindar's First Olympian Ode the challenge is to celebrate the victory of Hiero in a major chariot race at Olympia—one of the first Peloponnesian sites at which the greatest games and festivals of Archaic Greece were held. The ode consists of four triads—four combinations of the three dance modes—and moves through them with a daring brilliance of allusion, which—*please note this carefully*—refers extensively to the nature and fate of the divine Pelops, name giver to the Peloponnesus, whose ivory shoulder is explained in detail, in such a fashion that the divine background of Pelops is brought to an explanation of his own astounding gifts as a

charioteer, gifts which, we are given to understand by the end of the ode, apply equally to the charioteer of Hiero, on whom the implications of more than human skill rub off. The conclusion of this ode, noble praise of both King Hiero and of the poet himself, raises the mortal events of a horse race to an epic level--celebrating human greatness which intersects with the immortal. What requires attention here is the elaborate embedding of the victor-praise in a myth setting in which the mortal and the 'divine' bleed into one another. Byzantine allusive references tie together the parts of this verbal tapestry; a complex brilliance peculiar only to the greatest lyric poets, like William Butler Yeats.

## **Epic poetry and early Greek philosophy.**

The epic imagination privileged comprehensive poetic visions of the order of the cosmos and of the passions displayed by the noble figures of adventure and folk thought. In other words the epic vision, even in a sometimes prosaic writer like Hesiod, inclines to imagine the big picture. While sharing this big picture poetic concern, the philosophical imagination took a different path into the description of what the world is. We may best consider that path as one of analysis, the taking apart of the experienced world, to see what makes it tick, as distinct from the epic poet's embrace in formalized language of the outflowering meanings of the human and natural world. We can see the *philosophical* dimension of thought in the earliest Greek rational analysis, emerging from the Greek speaking cultural centers of Asia Minor. While it may seem that the three Milesian 'philosophers,' working from Asia Minor in the sixth century, created kinds of mythology of the chief elements of the physical world-- *air, fire, water*—we will find, upon looking further, that the *analytical* impulse is what prevails in the thinking of these men.

**The analytic imagination.** Epic poetry delights in narratives built on narratives, and on extensive—and of course meaningful—adventuring into implication, meaning, and interpretation. The earliest forms of *philosophy* in Greece grew up through the mists of Greek cultural awareness, and in the forms of mythology, the complex of tales the Greeks worshipped and fabulated through, meanings of the physical and spiritual world were constantly put into play. (The dance of fantasy with hard thought is what makes a great mythology like the Greek of lasting interest.) But mythology is only a step toward analysis...and rarely pursues its narratives to a conclusion. With the Milesians, from the cultural center of Miletus in Asia Minor, with its face toward the older and more sophisticated cultures of the East—Babylonian, Egyptian—the mythic impulse began to assume the form of a reflective address to the tales told by the Greeks from immemorial time. Into these world narratives was inserted a question: *what is the essence of the dramatic life epic and myth bring before us?*

## Thales (ca. 585 B.C.)

Thales' question was apparently *what is the first principle of reality, that from which all derives?* (Apparently: the few fragments that remain to us from Thales are embedded in the writing of other philosophers, especially of Aristotle (#60) , and can be very cryptic.) Aristotle gives the following, in explanation of Thales' answer: *Over the number, however, and the form of this kind of principle they (the Milesian philosophers) do not agree: but Thales, the founder of this type of philosophy, says it (the first principle) is water, and therefore declared that the earth is on water...(Metaphysics 983 b 6).* Thales' water-answer falls in line with the cosmological thinking of those Babylonian and Sumerian speculations—**indeed** with the perspective of the Book of *Genesis*—for which our just created world is imagined floating on a body of water, the mists from which gradually clear to reveal the firm contours of a landmass. In any case, we clearly see the difference between Thales' imagination, in addressing the meaning of the world, and that of the other two Milesian thinkers—Anaximander (#26) and Anaximenes (#28)--frequently joined to him.

*Thales asserted Water to be the principle of things. For he saw that matter was principally dispensed in moisture, and moisture in water; and it seemed proper to make that the principle of things, in which the virtues and powers of beings, and especially the elements of their generations and restorations, were chiefly found. He saw that the breeding of animals is in moisture; that the seeds and kernels of plants (as long as they are productive and fresh), are likewise soft and tender; that metals also melt and become fluid, and are as it were concrete juices of the earth, or rather a kind of mineral waters; that the earth itself is fertilised and revived by showers or irrigation, and that earth and mud seem nothing else than the lees and sediment of water; that air most plainly is but the exhalation and expansion of water; nay, that even fire itself cannot be lighted, nor kept in and fed, except with moisture and by means of moisture. He saw, too, that the fatness which belongs to moisture, and which is the support and life of flame and fire, seems a kind of ripeness and concoction of the water. (Francis Bacon; 1561-1626)*

## **Anaximander** (610-546 B.C.)

Anaximander was a disciple of Thales. His imaginative turn was to pose to himself many questions about the nature, shape and movements of the earth and heavens, and above all about the first principle of all he observed on the earth. 'He says that it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but some other indefinite nature, from which came into being all the heavens and the worlds in them.' (The Greek word, *to apeiron*, means 'the indefinable,' and is often translated as 'the cosmic infinite.' All things pass into and out of that *apeiron*, in a constant circular sequence of births and destructions.

**Is this Milesian thinking a form of imagination? Is it literature?** In this syllabus we are putting pressure on the terms *imagination* and *literature*. By *imagination* we mean, here, style of conceiving and reporting on the world. The epic poet's style of doing this is different from that of the Milesian philosopher. The epic poet elaborates an artistically formalized account of the world; the Milesian philosopher cuts the richness of the world back to its essence. (In the case of Anaximander there is evidence of basic natural scientific thinking which is unparalleled in early Greek philosophy. He speculated boldly on the nature of the planets, and on the 'anthropology' of mankind's millennial social development.) Is the word *literature* large enough to cover both of these kinds of action? The word *literature* will suffice, if we interpret it as the Milesians interpreted their world-stuff. Literature means a creation out of *litterae*, letters, and is one of the ways humans express themselves in sound and writing. The literary act is the act of working in letters, the language you are, to inflect your expression of the world. Interpreted in that way, the term *literature* expands to cover a variety of actions—epic poetry, philosophy, and other fields, like dramatic expression, lyric expression, and historical expression.

*Whence things have their origin,  
Thence also their destruction happens,  
According to necessity;  
For they give to each other justice and recompense  
For their injustice  
In conformity with the ordinance of Time*



## **Pythagoras (570-490 B.C.)**

Pythagoras was born on the island of Samos, in a milieu of Ionian Greek speakers, but beyond that we know little of his youth. His father was a gem engraver, his education almost certainly privileged, and he was clearly a traveller, reaching Egypt, and perhaps even India, in his search for exotic wisdoms. The decisive move for his life was to Croton, in Southern Italy, in 530 B.C.. By that time, clearly, Pythagoras was a well known teacher, on the way to assuming the divine or magical status that followed him through life, and long after his life. Building on that widespread reputation he founded a religious settlement in Croton, to which he attracted a devoted following. What exactly he taught at that school is hard to say, and involves us in the whole question of the myth and reality of this great figure. (He left behind no writings, and is known to us entirely through references and commentaries reaching us from his own time, through Plato and Aristotle, all the way to the third century A.D.) There are certain key accounts of what Pythagoras had on offer as a teacher: he was a master mathematician—the Pythagorean theorem is part of world school learning—whose interest in that subject migrated directly to the issue of the place of mathematical truth in the order of the cosmos, the harmony dominating both music and the spheres. At the same time the mythography of this individual turned him into a semi-divine figure, offspring of Apollo, a person who 'gleamed' by nature, and whose thigh was made of gold. Support for this personal cult build up, which has lasted to our day, was provided by ancient tales of his virtually monastic community at Croton, in which a strict temperance was considered essential to good thinking, in which certain foods—meat, in any case—were forbidden, and in which mystical insights, thematized by mathematics, were the order of the day.

*For as long as man continues to be the ruthless destroyer of lower living beings, he will never know health or peace. For as long as men massacre animals, they will kill each other. Indeed, he who sows the seeds of murder and pain cannot reap joy and love.*

**Anaximines** ( d. 528 B.C.)

.Aristotle makes the following comment, in the *Metaphysics* (#62).

*Most of the earliest philosophers conceived only of material principles as underlying all things. That of which all things consist, from which they first come and into which on their destruction they are ultimately resolved, of which the essence persists although modified by its affections—this, they say, is an element and principle of existing things. Hence they believe that nothing is either generated or destroyed, since this kind of primary entity always persists....In the same way nothing else is generated or destroyed; for there is some one entity (or more than one) which always persists and from which all other things are generated. All are not agreed, however, as to the number and character of these principles. Thales, the founder of this school of philosophy, says the permanent entity is water....Anaximenes and Diogenes held that air is prior to water, and is of all corporeal elements most truly the first principle.*

What we know of Anaximines is little. We have to assume he lived in Asia Minor, with the other 'Milesian' material monists, Thales and Anaximander, for whom the search for a world principle led through the early impulses of scientific thought. The kind of science that drove Anaximines, to judge from the numerous comments on and rare fragments of him, was a blend of observation and poetic enrichment. Like his contemporaries he was interested both in locating a physical principle—in his case air—which in its many transformations could become the multiple forms of our universe, and in characterizing the kind of balance that 'Inheres' among the component parts of the created world. The first inquiry, into physical principles, led Anaximines to identify an element which, on the Asia Minor coast, could regularly be seen evaporating (and cooling) into the sky, and condensing (and heating) into objects on earth. From these two processes the constitutions of all that is—from the stars and planets to rocks under our feet—could be seen as part of a natural whole. Poetry of a sort is what supplies the vision and balance of that whole: the hot and the cold, the dry and the wet in polarity, all things balanced in an ultimate stasis, which gives the lie to the appearance of change.

**Xenophanes** (570.B.C.--early 5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.)

Xenophanes was born in Colophon in Ionia, on the coast of Asia Minor. (The eastern islands of the Aegean and the Asia Minor coast were exceptionally fertile in poets and philosophers; in part, perhaps, because the natural features of that area awakened a sharp sensitivity to light, landscape changes, and color, as well as to natural processes like evaporation and dewfall.) His career seems to have been that of a rhapsode, a professional singer like Homer or Pindar, and his life was one of constant travel, from one court to another. He speaks of himself, in one of the 45 fragments of his work that remain, as having been 'tossed' around from one part of Greece to another. We have to assume that his rhapsode career was devoted both to 'entertaining,' containing as it did drinking songs in various lyric meters, and to expressing his 'views of the world,' which, unlike those of any of the lyric poets we have considered earlier, were critical and philosophical.

*But if cattle and horses and lions had hands  
or could paint with their hands and create works such as men do,  
horses like horses and cattle like cattle  
also would depict the gods' shapes and make their bodies  
of such a sort as the form they themselves have.*

Several remaining fragments of Xenophanes concern the anthropocentric weakness of our concepts of god, and in at least one point he speaks of the 'positive character' of god;

One god greatest among gods and men,  
not at all like mortals in body or in thought.

The critical turn of thought in Xenophanes—remember this is rhapsodic 'poetry'—spills over into his comments on the knowing process in general. He comments, for instance, on the fact that the gods have created sweet honey for our delight, but had they not, we would consider figs—a routine and commonplace item of diet—the finest taste there is. With the same mindset Xenophanes inquires into natural processes, reflecting at length about the nature and importance of clouds in shaping the atmosphere, and of the constitution of the sun and the nature of evaporation. Like the Roman poet Lucretius (1<sup>st</sup> Century B.C.) Anaxagoras finds it natural to do his philosophy in the long lines of epic verse.

## **Heraclitus (536-475 B.C.)**

Heraclitus was born in Ionia, on the Asia Minor coast, not far from Miletus. Thus he was a neighbor, and a near contemporary, to Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, the so called Milesian *hylozoists* (believers that matter is the prime stuff of life.) However Heraclitus seems not to have known these contemporaries, or to have traveled much in his lifetime. He remains--to judge from his single book, a large papyrus scroll he is said to have deposited in the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus--he remains a complex, poetic and speculative writer, truly an early Greek fusion of poet and philosopher. (Poet 'in spirit,' for it does not appear that he wrote 'poetry' in a formal sense.) Like Anaxagoras, who thought men incapable of thinking past their own anthropocentrism, Heraclitus adopted the general view point that poets are fools: he found Homer incapable of forming a mature attitude toward the gods, and he thought the religious figure Pythagoras a fraud.

Heraclitus considered himself a vehicle of the Truth—as Hesiod considered himself the Muse speaking him.

*Of this Word's being forever do men prove to be uncomprehending, both before they hear and once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Word, they are like the unexperienced experiencing words and deeds such as I explain when I distinguish each thing according to its nature and show how it is. Other men are unaware of what they do when they are awake just as they are forgetful of what they do when they are asleep.*

The most arresting part of Heraclitus' world view is his conviction that the ultimate flux of the universe is *fire*, that like fire the created world is constantly in motion. The river is the perfect example of the endless flow of things, and describes the whole creation, which like a river acquires its identity by ceaseless change. This perception lies behind Heraclitus' view that 'a person cannot step twice into the same river,' a statement which not only characterizes the river, but characterizes the person, whose own stability is sustained by interaction with the flow.

*Period Three The Classical Age (500 B.C.-400 B.C.)*

*DRAMA*

Topic 27 Origins of Tragedy

Topic 28 Aeschylus

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## Origins of Tragedy

When we come to the drama, however, the realm of what Aristotle first spoke of as 'bodies in motion,' we are in a fresh new cross between 'reality' and 'fabrication.' We are thus impacted with a direct power unknown to other genres of literature! Where did this genre come from?

The origins of Greek tragedy. Unlike epic and philosophy, though not unlike the lyric, Greek tragedy seems to have grown out of dance and choral music. (The *seems* is important, because the origins of the tragic drama, though long fascinating to scholars, remain hidden in obscurity.) While the fifth century is the great period for both tragedy and comedy, there was an Archaic creative period, deep in the world of Hesiod's time and probably even older, when rural/religious dance festivals, which mesh with the origins of lyric, began to create early forms of choral action. (We see a form of this fusion, not really a drama, in the celebratory paeans of Pindar, where within the chorus there is a dramatic exchange accompanied by formal dance routines.) The goal of the Pindaric Ode was praise. The origin of the tragic drama was more nearly awe than praise. That awe expressed itself in technical developments from within the original dance formula, which was itself tightly woven into religious rites—for Dionysus. In one of the first steps in this technical development, the chief dance spokesman split off from the body of the choral dancers, and began to dialogue with them. This split-off figure became the first actor, and by century's end had been joined by a second actor. (Two actors plus chorus were the basic ingredients throughout the course of classical Greek drama, tragedy *and* comedy; but though we know such basics from our own observation, and from Greek commentators like Aristotle, we have only the sketchiest outlines of the sixth century developments that led to the great sophistication of fifth century tragedy.) We do know that significant theatrical structures were created during the sixth century B.C., and that by the time of Aeschylus the Theater of Dionysus served as a centerpiece of Athenian municipal life, built against the slopes of the Acropolis, and drawing to it large crowds on the occasion of major religious festivals.

## **Aeschylus** (525 B.C.-456 B.C.)

In seven extant dramas, produced in the first half of the fifth century B.C., the playwright Aeschylus takes us from the mythical imagination of the epic tradition into mimetic action aimed to engage the newly self-directing democracy of Athenian citizens.

Aeschylus is the first classical dramatist we know, a writer of great vision and depth of human understanding, who took the choral-actor ingredients of the sixth century drama, and powerfully raised the expressive power of drama, as well as enriching the on-stage relationship between the chorus and the main, and eventually a second, actor. Though we have only seven remaining plays, out of some ninety Aeschylus wrote, those works span a twenty-five year period during which Greek drama was evolving at a meteoric rate, and give us a perspective onto the whole genre. The oldest remaining play of Aeschylus, *The Persians* (472 B.C.) , concerns the defeat of Xerxes in the Persian Wars, and (remarkably) puts itself empathetically inside the minds of the pitifully defeated Persian widows. The remaining Aeschylean plays are *The Oresteia* (458 B.C.), the only intact Greek trilogy, a three-play unit involving a climactic engagement with a single mythical theme, *Prometheus Bound*, *The Seven Against Thebes*, and *The Suppliant Maidens*.

**The Theme of the Oresteia.** The three plays of the *Oresteia* (that is, the tale of Orestes, son of Agamemnon) are based on themes from Greek mythology, and like most Greek tragedies form what later Greeks called 'slices from Homer's banquet.' In the first of these plays the Greek leader of the War against Troy returns home, his concubine with him, to find a furious wife (and her lover) and to be slain by her outraged son Orestes. In the second play, which would be watched on the second day of the display of Aeschylus' work in the annual competition, we see Orestes paying the price for his unholy mother-murder, and the Erinyes, hag-like spirits of divine revenge, assaulting Orestes and driving him crazy. In the final play the Gods, led by Athena, hold a trial of Orestes at the law court on the slopes of the Acropolis, and in a very close decision exonerate the murderer. This powerful, supra realistic, immensely metaphorical and verbally structured drama—one might almost say 'opera'—deals with issues of revenge, justice, honor and law.

Seven plays remain for us from the more than one hundred Aeschylus composed. Dependent as we are on historical chance—fires, wars, neglect, indifference to ancient manuscripts—we realize that the image we create, of the work of a given Ancient Greek writer, are at best the fragmentary pieces of a whole. In the case of Aeschylus, whose vision is at all times soaring and metaphorical, this reconstruction process can be especially difficult.

Besides the *Oresteia*, which in the widest sense is concerned with the establishment of the rule of law in Athens, the following four plays continue to turn around the issue of the polis, its relation to 'the divine order' of the gods, and the drama of inter clan warfare. (In other words the nature and establishment of society is of constant interest here):

*Prometheus Bound* (480's B.C.) This early play of Aeschylus—though the date and even authorship have been challenged—pits the Titan Prometheus against the iron will of the Father of the Gods, Zeus. Prometheus is chained to a rock in the Caucasus, for having stolen fire and passed it on to mankind. We seem to see, here, the first play in a trilogy which will lead to eventual reconciliation between god and man.

*The Persians* (472 B.C.) stages a prolonged lament, by the Persian court and a chorus of Persian women who are in despair over their loss to the Greeks in the naval Battle of Salamis. Remarkable for us, today, is the sympathy of Aeschylus for the woes of his 'enemy.'

*The Seven Against Thebes* (467 B.C.) depicts the conflict between the two sons of King Theseus, each of whom is supposed to rule the city in alternating years. Unfortunately, as happens, the one brother refuses to cede the power at the end of his reign, and has to fight it out with his brother, in a dramatic hand to hand combat which kills them both

*The Suppliant Maidens* (463 B.C.) is just that, the fluttering imprecation, of a band of women suppliants, fleeing from rape and victimization through forced marriage, and begging Pelasgus, the ruler of Athens, for shelter. Pelasgus is sympathetic, but feels he must consult his people on the matter, which he does. Their agreement to shelter the women is thus made part of an innovative democratic decision process in Athens.



## Sophocles (496.B.C.-406 B.C.)

The Theban trilogy—*Oedipus*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus* (401 B.C.).  
*Ajax*, *Women of Trachis*, *Philoctetes* (409 B.C.)

Sophocles, often considered the greatest master of the Greek tragic form, died a half century after Aeschylus, leaving a legacy of seven extant dramas—well over a hundred plays in fragmentary condition, or simply 'referred to' by others-- and an unmatched record of successes in the annual theatrical contests at Athens. Sophocles competed in thirty annual competitions, and won twenty four-- defeating Aeschylus himself in more than one instance--while Aeschylus won fourteen times and Euripides, the third of the great tragedians, won only four times. (Yes, victory in these contests was a 'popularity contest,' but the fifth century Athenian theater goer, adult male citizens, was the central figure in a polity of unrivalled brilliance; no usual Broadway habitu , but heir to an already rich mythical/thematic tradition, and to a language which many centuries had by now brought to a fine polish.) What was the ineffable secret of Sophocles' greatness? His Olympian perspective, his intricate plots focusing on a single crucial event, his irony, and in the end, while retaining his skepticism about the universe, his granting to Fate a dignity, and spirit of justice, which ennoble even violent and beaten protagonists. This entry concerns two plays, the early play *Antigone* (hard to date exactly) and the mature *Oedipus the King* (401 B.C.), which are arguably Sophocles' greatest works, and which both concern tragic events in the royal House of Thebes. Above all this entry features the wide ranging trilogy concept which traces Oedipus' spiritual course from rage to grace, and deals frontally with the personal courage of the idealistic Antigone, and the challenge she raises to the political status quo represented by Creon.

The *Antigone* turns on the fateful decision of a young woman to bury her brother, in contravention of the city's laws. The forbidden burial is reported to the authorities by a guard:

*I don't know. There was no sign of digging,  
no marks of any pick axe or  
mattock. ]  
The ground was dry and hard and very smooth,  
without a wheel track. Whoever did it  
left no trace. When the first man on day watch  
revealed it to us, we were all amazed.  
The corpse was hidden, but not in a tomb.  
It was lightly covered up with dirt,  
as if someone wanted to avert a curse.  
There was no trace of a wild animal  
or dogs who'd come to rip the corpse apart*

**The historical setting of Sophocles.** Sophocles created his plays during the second half of the fifth century B.C., while Aeschylus, as we have seen, created his during the first half. (We are playing a little loose with dates, but you can quickly Wikipedia out the relevant details, so far as we know them.) Both the highest brilliance, and the gradual unraveling of Athens take place in the second half of the fifth century B.C. Whereas the first half of the century saw the rapid development of political democracy, individualism in lyric and theater (Aeschylus), and above all the astonishing victories over the huge Persian Empire, the second half of the century was dominated by intra polis conflict on the Greek mainland, the

breaking down of traditional values during the Sophist intervention in Athens, and above all the long-lasting Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.), with its devastating consequences for economic and social development. It was in this turbulent—if brilliant—second half of the great century that Sophocles created his masterpieces. And what do you know? They are masterpieces of classical *serenity*!

**What to look for in reading Sophocles.** From the spectator's point of view, watching from the banked stone seats of the Theater of Dionysus in Athens, the dance—turn, counterturn, standstill: intricate dance steps meshing with the highly refined prosody of the language--and the stilted, costumed appearance of the all male actors—all this would have exercised a startling operatic effect. (Mental reconstruction is essential here. The same with the classical Temple, like the Parthenon, which was brightly painted at this time, but from which the colors have all faded away, leaving the beautiful but misleading surface of gleaming marble, which we now associate with the public buildings of ancient Greece and Rome.) Above all, of course, look for the central theme or crisis, around which the drama is thrillingly disposed: the struggle, in *Antigone*, between tradition (traditional burial practice, so central to archaic culture) and the Realpolitik of state government (Creon's province); the terrifying struggle of Oedipus to locate a polluting murderer who he himself is, and eventually, horribly, discovers.

The Theban trilogy and the *Antigone* jump to the fore when we feel for the classic perfection of Sophoclean drama, in which plot and character fuse in the white heat of passion, generating that response of catharsis, of which Aristotle writes in the *Poetics* (#60), seeing that purging reaction as a mode of inspiration. The three plays highlighted in this entry are all notable for their portraits of 'heroic'—note the quotation marks—characters driven to the extremity of despair, and in two cases committing suicide. Were we to have the complete trilogies in which each of these plays was initially embedded, we would doubtless better understand the overarching theme in which these personal tragedies are embedded, and yet nothing can dilute the immediate tragic passion of these three dramatic events, drawn as almost always in Greek tragedy directly from Greek myth. (One exception: Aeschylus' *Persians*, which is based on 'current events.')

We have to wonder, once again, at the capacity of that myth to transmit the deepest and most contemporarily relevant emotions.

We might say that the three tragic characters in question, here, are 'sensitives,' not men or women of state, not in the position to speechify to the polis, like Oedipus. Ajax has been deeply wounded in his amour proper, because the weapons of Achilles (as recounted in the *Iliad*) have been given to Odysseus instead of to himself. (To note: Homer's two epics continue to provide the raw material of Greek literature for centuries, and have in fact dominated both the profound achievements of mediaeval and modern Greek literature.) His wounded warrior's honor leads to his madness and self-destruction. Deianira, the female protagonist of *The Women of Trachis*, has prepared a love shirt for her husband Heracles, upon his return from accomplishing his legendary Labors; unfortunately the love potion applied to the shirt has been mixed with a deadly poison which consumes Heracles's body, and drives Deianira to kill herself. Philoctetes has been abandoned on Lemnos, by the Greeks on their way to attack Troy—Philoctetes has a foul infection in his leg—and subsequently the Greeks learn that they can only take Troy by means of Philoctetes' bow. The heart of the play centers on the maddened rage of Philoctetes, isolated and abandoned, until finally Odysseus and company return to try to win the bow away from him.

## **Euripides (480-406 B.C.)**

All that we have said of the setting of Sophocles and Aeschylus—those second half of the fifth century geniuses—belongs in spades to the ambient culture of Euripides. What *is* that ambient culture? The answer would be long. The Sophists are important. These teachers of wisdom—including public thinkers and discussers like Protagoras and Gorgias—were of great influence in the second half of the fifth century. Why were these figures needed and turned to, and what did they offer? We have seen that there is a tradition of question-asking in Milesian philosophy, and that that tradition burgeons richly into the work of Plato. The Sophists too were perpetual raisers of questions, and in that process, and sometimes in the simple desire to attract pupils/clients, they were often underminers of traditional belief. Euripides was very alert to these voices. We have noted that, in connection with the recitation of the Homeric epics, there was a tradition of itinerant bards, public reciters who drew public crowds around them. By the fifth century Athens was itself ready for public discussion in every sense. There was a buzz on the streets. With the advent of a democratic polity, in the early fifth century, the energy of public outdoor life had grown vibrant in Athens—especially around the central Agora or market place, the Theater of Dionysus, and the Law Courts, not to mention the sacred sites on the Acropolis. In these public venues, and among the sophisticated public dialecticians who frequented them, Athenian culture was being freed up into a passion for ideas and discussion. The Sophists were natural components of this social ferment. And into this fermenting cultural matrix Euripides emerged, writing dramas in great numbers, touching on ‘melodramatic passions,’ raising controversial issues, striking a ‘modern’ tone.

That modern tone was of many sorts: Euripides thought himself into the mind of women, and their unique social/personal problems; he explored the passionate and chaotic emotions that have to be pasted over in order for society to exist; and he was a master analyst of the immaturities that frequently underpin the psychology of the hero. Nothing about his daring inquiries will seem irrelevant to an inquiring mind in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**The Medea (431 B.C.)**. You will see at once that Medea—a slice, of course, from the rich archive of mythical material available to every Greek writer—is par excellence two things typically minimized in fifth century Greek culture: first, a *foreigner*, second, a *woman* who is fully invested with women’s needs and attitudes. (Would you say the same of Antigone, or of Cassandra in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*?) Brought back to Greece from the exotic East, and by a conventional and deceitful mainstreamer, Jason, Medea finds that her marriage and her children have been supplanted by a new bride, and her own exile. She takes a terrible revenge! What has changed here, from Aeschylus and Sophocles? The outsider has been drawn into the Hellenic dialogue, with fierce consequences. We are growing away from the still nobility of the archaic classical posture—and Euripides is taking us there.

**The Hippolytus (429 B.C.)**. The intricacies of jealousy, insinuation, betrayal of innocence, melodramatic finale—all these elements of pop psychology become the raw material of this ‘modern’ drama, which bathes in the questioning, discussion-rich atmosphere of a literary culture which is conspicuously public. As in the *Medea*, Euripides penetrates, here, into the feelings which undergird those ritual/mythical behaviors which were the stock of epic, and of the two tragedians we have studied before Euripides. The fixed world of myth has been opened out to reveal the boiling humanity myth was initially created to temper.

Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, performed in Athens at the Greater Dionysia in 428 B.C. draws quite naturally from the mythological treasure trove inherited from Homer and the earliest Greek

worship, but blends that traditionalism with a profound sense of psychological reality and human dilemma. We will survey this play with an eye to the strategies of Euripides the tragedian.

The plot? Theseus, king of Troezen, lives with his illegitimate son, the handsome youth Hippolytus, whose sole love is hunting in the woods, and whose sole divinity is Artemis, goddess of hunting and wild nature. Nothing could put him at a farther pole from his new step-mother, Phaedra, the fresh bride of Theseus. Phaedra is taken over by Aphrodite, the goddess of love and foe of Artemis, who is the opponent of sexual love, and who makes Phaedra fall in love with Hippolytus. Under this pressure Phaedra, sleepless and desperate, asks her nurse to present a love note to Hippolytus, asking him for an assignation. Hippolytus is horrified—sexually unattracted to his stepmother, and outraged at her infidelity--and makes it clear that he rejects the proposal. At that point Phaedra, knowing the story is out in public, and that her life is doomed, hangs herself, leaving a note saying that Hippolytus has tried to rape her. This treacherous and disastrous move leads to Theseus' outraged fury, and his arousal of the sea goddess Poseidon. Poseidon rises as a huge wave, smites Hippolytus's chariot, as he is fleeing along the beach, and destroys the young man, who in dying comes to understand the whole story and to forgive his father.

This tale presents the same internal self-generating tragic quality as *Oedipus The King*—at least if one accepts that Artemis and Aphrodite, as agents here, are essentially ways of speaking about the mindsets of Hippolytus and Phaedra. Given that interpretation the play deploys as a tragedy of violent lust counterbalanced by an excessive devotion to the life of the forests, a life shunning the demands of society. It is possible, but irresolvable, that to the Athenian audience this play was a dramatic illustration of the belief that we should do nothing in excess.

**The Bacchae (405 B.C.).** The Athens of the end of century—think of Pythagoras or Socrates-- was concerned not only with the new importance of women and foreigners, the foreign in general, but with psychologically 'modern' modes of feeling, emotional experimentation and quest, and passion breaking out from the mythical mold—where it is confined in the cases of Cassandra, Clytemnestra, or Antigone—square into the midst of Greek society. Pentheus, of course, is the perfect bureaucrat foil against which to read the unlicensed and uncontrollable fury of the Bacchantes, exaggerated representatives of a strain of the demonic, which lurks throughout Greek culture, even when what we most expect is form and reason.

## Comedy

With Greek comedy we are still dealing with annual public performances, held at major religious festivals in Athens, in the Theater of Dionysus. The same intense competition for prizes, the same lively and personally involved audience. But from the first glance we note a change in the kinds of theme presented. With Aristophanes we find no mythical titles, no actions based on 'slices from Homer's feast,' and total involvement with contemporary issues—the folly of war, the vagaries of the legal system in Athens, mundane but hilarious rivalries between competing dramatic poets, the practice of 'selling wisdom' in public (the practice imputed to the Sophists. In other words we find Athenian comedy highly 'issue oriented,' as was the tragic drama of Euripides; while the earlier tragedians were, we might say, 'myth driven.')

We have seen tragic dramatists concerned with 'actual events'—*The Persians* of Aeschylus, for example---or with contemporarily relevant events—the practice of Euripides—but with Aristophanes and Greek comedy we see the veil of the mythical almost totally stripped away. If you pursue the historical background of this genre difference, you will enter into competing theories of the kinds of dance festival tragedy and comedy split off from, in Archaic Greece. (That byway of historical investigation will bring you to the door of the satyr play, the 'extra play' the tragedian would insert into his trilogy as an entertainment, and in fact a conduit back into another kind of bumptious and erotic rural archaic past.) The secret to the peculiar *reality-driven* character of Greek comedy may lie hidden in the archaic roots of the genre. The roots of the comic are doubtless in fertility rites and harvest ceremonies, which themselves have around the world been drivers for rural ritual.

**Is the comic drama 'conservative'?** Greek comedy, while dealing with the foibles of the real present, works from a position of assured value, generally the rightness of the old ways, and sees the present as falling away 'comically' from the standard occupied by the comedian: who believes in old fashioned wisdom, the traditional dispensation of justice, the dignity of the creative artist as derived from the Homeric model. Greek comedy, like comedy in general, looks down from a confident view point. How else can you mock?

## **Aristophanes (448-380 B.C.)**

**The Clouds** (423 B.C.) takes aim at precisely the 'public selling of wisdom, or argumentative skill,' of which the Sophists were accused. In fact Socrates, who was in no way guilty of such 'public selling,' is the butt of the joke in this drama about an ambitious farmer, whose son has racked up a huge debt, and whose dad is facing an angry law court. The son is sent to Socrates' 'Thinkery,' a thought-house where one learns not only to forget about the traditional values of the Athenians, but how to trick the law courts, and pull the wool over juries' eyes. The ensuing turmoil is terribly funny, but not innocuous, for in fact the bias against Socrates, which we see the results of in Plato's *Apology*, is being established right here in this play, written a quarter century before Socrates' death. There could be no more compelling argument, that comedy bites hard into the social fabric.

**Lysistrata** (411 B.C.). The downward spiral of Athenian political life, toward the end of the exhausting Peloponnesian War, the growing influence of women in social life, and the delights of bawdy sex: all these conditions converge to support this hilarious/biting comedy. Basically, the women of Athens are fed up with war, and with male ineptitude, and in a series of moves take over the Acropolis, the sacred center of Athens, and read the riot act to their husbands. No sex until the war ends. The way this torture plays out is as phallic and uproarious as Athenian public amusement could be, joining serious points to outrageous fantasies.

### **The Frogs (405 B.C.)**

Dionysus, the god of the theater for the Athenians, is disgusted at the low quality of dramatic presentations in Athens, Sophocles and Euripides having died the previous year. He decides to descend into Hades and to bring back Euripides, his favorite poet. However when Dionysus arrives in the underworld he finds himself in the midst of hubbub and a literary duel between Euripides and Aeschylus, over which is the better poet. In the end Dionysus returns from Hades with Aeschylus, but what brings down the house is not that outcome, but the subtle/raucous debate, between Euripides and Aeschylus, over which is the better poet. It is this debate that I stress, *the subtleties of literary points aired to a delighted citizen audience!*

We have already noted, in the *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes' inclination toward the bawdy, and in fact the bawdy, connected with fertility rites and harvest festivals, goes far back into the origins of comedy. It is the purpose of this entry simply to reinforce the sense, which we have from *Lysistrata*, that Aristophanes (and his audience) delight both in political theory and in the juggling of the male-female balance in society; stressing female power, control over men, and the regular incompetence of men to shape their own social political destiny.

In the *Ecclesiazusae* (391 B.C.), on the occasion of a major female festival day, the women of Athens take over the Assembly—by a sequence of burlesque cross-dressing tricks, by which the men are thrown off the scent—and set up what we might call a Socialist state, all property in common. One of the provisions of this state is that all men can sleep with all women, with one proviso: that before sleeping with a beautiful woman each man must first sleep with an ugly one. The meat of the play lies in the power the women obtain thereby, and their eventual conversion of the poor men, helpless and confused, into reasonable citizens who will work maturely on their democracy. So, just as in the *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes works in the *Ecclesiazusae* to overjoy the audience and make a solid political point.

The *Thesmophoriazusae* (411 B.C.) is also set during a major women's festival in Athens. In this play the women, dressed in their husbands' clothes, are attempting to take over the Acropolis, and to set up a new government. Their hilarious efforts, which eventually lead the men to a sane view of political behavior, turn around the efforts of the men to insert a spy, dressed in women's clothes, to get the lowdown on the women's movements.

*Chorus singing*

*Look quickly for the traces that might show you a man hidden here, let your glances fall on every side; look well to the right and to the left. If we seize some impious fellow, woe to him! He will know how we punish the outrage, the crime, the sacrilege. The criminal will then acknowledge at last that gods exist; his fate will teach all men that the deities must be revered, that justice must be observed and that they must submit to the sacred laws.*

## **Parmenides** (Early 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.)

Parmenides is widely considered the most serious 'technical philosopher' of early Greece, a prelude to the greatness of thoughts of Plato (one of whose dialogues is entitled 'Parmenides,') and Aristotle. What we know of the philosophy of Parmenides is embodied in a single long poem. That poem, later entitled 'On Nature,' was 800 lines long and of it some 160 lines have survived in fragmentary form, permitting a tentative reconstruction of the whole. We can in capsule form indicate the nature and argument of that poem, but first a word on the kinds of material we are including in this ebook. We have already met philosophy in poetry—Solon, Theognis, Heraclitus—and we are aware that poetry was older than prose as a vehicle of expression in archaic Greece. That is part of the explanation of our inclusion of philosophy as 'literature' in this ebook on Greek literature. But it is not the only explanation. Ancient Greek philosophy is consistently 'poetic' in its inquiries, as distinct, say, from varieties of analytical philosophy practiced today. Parmenides is the stellar example of the blending of the poetic with the speculative.

In his long poem the narrator opens with a chariot ascent to the 'home of a goddess.' This is a kind of 'mystical ascent,' and its goal is the Gates of Night, that mysterious region Hesiod too addressed as the home of the 'truth'—for like Plato, later, Parmenides addresses the truth as a reality of the way things are, an objective presence. In the presence of the goddess the narrator is given the power to see the 'logical structure of Being,' which is to say, in this case, the kind of interplay that exists between plurality and oneness. Stages of an argument unfold in which it is made clear that there is in fact no plurality, that the appearances of multiplicity in things are illusory.

*We can speak and think only of what exists. And what exists is uncreated and imperishable for it is whole and unchanging and complete. It was not nor shall be different since it is now, all at once, one and continuous...*

In developing this central point, Parmenides works with the same kind of concern Heraclitus centered on, in his presentations of the dialectic between the changeless and the ever changing; an opposition resolved by Parmenides in favor of the unchanging.



## **Empedocles** (492 B.C.-432 B.C.)

Empedocles was born and lived his life in Acragas in Sicily, and was a physician as well as a philosopher. Like Heracleitus and Parmenides. Empedocles is a philosopher in hexameters, using the same coercive and shaping metrical vehicle as Homer and Hesiod. His work has come down to us in the form of two lengthy poems, 'On Nature,' and 'Purifications.' The first deals with the cosmos in general, and the nature of coming into being and perishing—in natural terms. The second deals with the proper principles of moral behavior inside such a cosmos.

In 'On Nature' Empedocles maintains that there are four material 'roots,' from which all that exists grows. These 'roots' are fire, air, earth, and water. Two forces give momentum to these roots—which might be compared to the fundamental elements Thales and the other Milesians consider the building blocks of natural reality. For Empedocles those elements, *love* and *strife*, both join and separate the constituents of reality, building and disassembling them in an infinite sequence of creations and destructions. As Empedocles puts it:

*A twofold tale I shall tell: at one time it grew to be one alone out of many, at another again it grew apart to be many out of one. Double is the birth of mortal things and double their falling; for one is brought to birth and destroyed by the coming together of all things, the other is nurtured and flies apart as they grow apart again. And these things never cease their continual exchange, now through Love all coming together into one, now again each carried apart by the hatred of Strife. So insofar as it has learned to grow one from many, and again as the one grows apart [there] grow many, thus far do they come into being and have no stable life; but insofar as they never cease their continual interchange, thus far they exist always changeless in the cycle.*

In *The Purifications*, Empedocles conceives himself as a *daimon*, a spirit force or 'god,' who was banished from the immortals for infractions like meat eating. From his post as spokesperson for moral rehabilitation—and as a step on his own path toward immortality--Empedocles discourses here on purificatory rites, such as vegetarianism, whose spiritual importance he seems to have learned from the teachings of Pythagoras.

## **Democritus** (460 B.C.-

An atomist, Democritus received his inspiration from an even less known predecessor, Leucippus. (These early philosophers are known to us largely from remarks in later writers' texts, or from references in Diogenes Laertius (#75), whose *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* was written in the third century A.D., and who is, though a shaky source, often our primary knowledge base for earlier Greek thinkers.) The two of them are considered Atomists, for they both believed that the primary constitution of our world is indivisible particles in motion. The container for these particles, as they understood it, was a void, an empty space in which the atoms were in constant movement. We know that Democritus was especially concerned, in formulating this philosophy, to counter the view point of Parmenides, that motion is impossible, and that multiplicity is an illusion, which was in turn Parmenides' counter to Heraclitus, who maintained that all is flux. (We have to be amazed, as we review the density and interaction of philosophical view points, at this time, by just that, the speed and accuracy with which one thinker knew another one's position within the thought world of the Mediterranean Basin.)

The movement of the atoms, Democritus believed, was toward a constant rearrangement of the same components of the universe. Each atom, in a fashion appropriate to its own nature, was provided with hooks and barbs, with which it fitted into its fellow atoms, and in a fashion which held the totality together. The finesse of the interactions of these particles was infinite; adjustment, and the necessity which accompanied it, was continually at work; so fine was this intersection that our own perceptual process, and even our thought process, is made possible by the absorption or manipulation of the films or emanations from the atomic world. Within this system there was no first or final cause, in the Aristotelian sense, but infinite extent in time and space—the effectual meaning of the *void*. As for the ethic which pertained to this system of thought, it came down to a moderate hedonism, devoted to the modest life. Not surprisingly, considering his insights as what some have called 'the first scientist,' Democritus went so far as to sketch even an anthropology, by which he viewed the society of human beings in terms of evolution, from primitive to the polis.

## **The Sophists** (2d half of Fifth Cent. B.C.)

The Sophists were a group of itinerant teachers of knowledge, communication, and the basic principles of thinking effectively. Among the most effective of the group were Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, and Prodicus, although the definition of the group is not that easy, and depends, in fact, on how the group is defined. By a wide enough extension, the term found itself applied at times even to Socrates (#47). (That was the charge made against him by the comic poet Aristophanes, a charge which was one of the grounds for the execution of Socrates.) The reason for this difficulty in defining the group is that these teachers of knowledge and effective thought were only a loosely defined phenomenon, teachers who traveled throughout the Greek world teaching the skills of effective thinking. We might want, today, to compare this loose but vigorous movement to the vogue of thoughtful self-help writers whose books crowd the shelves of Barnes and Noble, and who advise (often very well) on how to speak, think, act effectively in our time. It might be added that today, as was true in fifth century Athens, this kind of educational service can be highly lucrative, and is often looked down on as hucksterism or pandering.

The most significant of the Sophists, and a qualified philosopher to boot, was Protagoras, although virtually all the Sophists make their ways into such philosophical fora as the dialogues of Plato. (Consult the Platonic dialogues *Hippias*, *Protagoras*, or *Gorgias*, to see how these teachers of wisdom are characterized.) Protagoras, for example, was clearly a systematic philosopher, with a world view that turned around specific views, and proved culturally influential. He wrote extensively on grammar, in great detail assorting the effective usages of the Greek language. He staged debate sessions, in which Athenians were invited to consider 'making the worst appear the better reason,' and from there he launches into the issue of relativism and value. He engaged in public discussions of propositions such as that it is impossible to say anything false, for every statement is a statement of something. In short Protagoras engaged closely with the thinking of his time, as did Socrates, who had the misfortune to be tarred with the charge of disrespecting the gods.

## **Socrates** (469 B.C.-399 B.C.)

Socrates, the most prominent Greek philosopher of the fifth century, saw the century out with his death. He belongs to his own time fiercely, as an ambulatory thinker and 'gadfly,' known for his lifetime of conversing with his fellow citizens. But he had other reasons to respect himself: as a military man who performed yeoman service in the many wars Athens fought in the mid-fifth century; as a senator from his district; as a householder with sons; in short as a full-complement citizen of Athenian democracy. His death, known to all, is a shame to Athens, but 'makes sense' from certain perspectives.

Throughout his public life Socrates, who was a follower of Anaxagoras (500-428 B.C.), remained in or near Athens, often teaching and discussing in public. (*Note:* the life and thought of Socrates, who never wrote, is preserved for us by his pupil, Plato, and it is very hard to distinguish Socrates the man from the figure of Socrates who is an essential character in Plato's work.) The main themes of his own teaching are simple, but his gift both for poetry and argumentation lifts those themes to world importance. Above all, Socrates remains true to the questioning tradition which dominated Milesian thought—Thales, Heraclitus--and which we have seen marking out a path sharply different from the mythological thinking of archaic Greek epic poetry. (Chronology matters here. The Milesians flourished in the first half of the sixth century, Socrates in the second half of the fifth century: over a century passed here, in which early Milesian thought was being supplemented by a lineage of distinguished thinkers—Heraclitus, Parmenides, Pythagoras—who were all formative for Socrates. Socrates found himself at the end of a distinguished line of 'analytical' thinkers.) As such he crowns the Hellenic thought development which has often been related to a global 'conscientization' of humanity around the fifth century B.C.; a vast movement of growing self awareness whose master thinkers would include Buddha, Lao tzu, Zoroaster, and Confucius, in addition to Socrates.

*I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled poets to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean.*

**Socrates' argument.** It is important to start with what Socrates did not do as a philosopher. For one thing, he did not write down his thoughts. For another, he did not lay down doctrines, positions that could be repeated and analyzed by others. (He left that to others, like Plato or Xenophon, who were sufficiently fascinated by him, that they built him into their own structures of thought.) Instead, it seems, he argued out the implications of ethical decision, by challenging interlocutors to examine what was implicit in their beliefs. For example, when those who talked with him in the marketplace or at the palestra (sports center) expounded ideas of what constituted virtue, he led them to examine those ideas and, in every case, to show themselves up as not knowing what they meant and not knowing the implications of what they said. In mock humility, Socrates made as though to subject himself to the same ruthless kind of critique. He referred—in Plato's *Apology*, the account of Socrates' trial statement—to the widely known response of the Delphic oracle that 'Socrates is the wisest of men.' This verdict seemed to Socrates to be indefensible until he began to query men who considered themselves wise, and found that they had no understanding of, for instance, what constitutes virtue or courage. And in what did Socrates exceed these other candidates for wisdom? How did he evaluate himself? He knew that he was not wise, while all the others thought, mistakenly, that they were wise. This method of inquiry, by which the interlocutor is invited to trap himself in admissions of ignorance, is the basic form of Socratic argument, and was by subsequent critics called his *elenchos*, or

cross-examination, technique. It will already be apparent, perhaps, that other philosophical positions will build from this *elenchos* work; it is clear that for Socrates an evanescent *truth* is the essence against which inquiry takes place, although that truth is present in the argument as a negative, the absolute condition which has to pertain in order for partial truths to be partial. From that implication we may already site the influence of Socrates on the huge written opus of his pupil Plato, for the development of a theory of ideas, in which the issue of truth could be firmly embedded, awaited the full development of Plato's own philosophy.

**Who was Socrates?** Socrates remains a mysterious figure. He wrote nothing, and so we are dependent, for our knowledge about him, on others who wrote about him. (There are three main sources of this kind: Xenophon (#63), the memoirist and military historian, who lived Socrates' world; the comic writer Aristophanes, who pilloried Socrates in contemporary plays like *The Birds*; and Plato, for whom Socrates became a leitmotif for increasingly refined dialogues of thought.) What most grounds Socrates is his trial, his reaction to it, and the place he played in his time. The trial in question stemmed from a culture suspicious above all of religious unorthodoxy; and the initial charge was that Socrates was indifferent to traditional religious practices. The world in which Socrates was put to death, for suspicions of this sort, was one in which public self-confidence was at a low.

**The historical setting of Socrates' trial and death.** A history of Ancient Greece will help to guide you through the rapids of Greek cultural history from 700 to 350 B.C. Socrates died in 399 B.C., Plato in 348 B.C., Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., Aristotle in 322 B.C. During the three centuries prior to Alexander's death Athens—remember our emphasis is falling on *Athens*, though a coherent (if less interesting) history could have been written about Thebes, Corinth, Sparta, and other city-states—passed through many social/political turns: during the seventh century the city-state defined itself slowly off from the epic clan and family world of Homer, making possible the growth, by the sixth century, of early forms of democracy, a coinage economy, a useable legal system, and a cohesive military force. The fifth century debuts with a huge challenge, The Persian Wars, which provide tumultuous victory followed quickly, in mid-century, by conflict and then War between Athens and Sparta, the two allies active in defeating the Persians. The teachings of Socrates occurred in an Athens which was on the verge of its eventual defeat by Sparta, and the death of Socrates coincided with post-war confusion, and a shaky alternation between tyranny and return to democracy. In the midst of such rapid change, Athens found itself hungry for its old traditions, suspicious of new and tricky teachings like those of the Sophists—which Socrates had nothing to do with—and ready for a kind of Joseph McCarthy purge of unorthodox thinkers. Into that vortex Socrates fell.

## Plato (427 B.C.-341 B.C)

**The Context.** The prosperity which had so buoyed Athens by the mid-fifth century, especially after the defeat of the massive Persian naval force at the Battle of Salamis (480 B.C.), found itself gradually eroded by such nagging calamities as the Peloponnesian War (finally lost conclusively to Sparta in 404 B.C.), the exhaustion of the Laurion Silver Mines, which had been a major source of military wealth for the polis, and politically reckless moves like the Sicilian expedition, on which the Athenians wasted money and manpower. (We marvel at the speed with which the classical balance, of the classical fifth century, dissipated; and with which the summit of art was replaced by the reflections of philosophy.) The history of the fourth century in Greece will lack the clear cut drama provoked by Athenian brilliance a century earlier. The first forty years of the fourth century saw the major city states--Athens, Sparta, and Thebes--interlocked in family power-games and warfare, the old spirit of democracy slowly leaching from the political Athenians. When Philip II became King of Macedon, in 359 B.C., the profile of Greek history veered, giving way to the power of Greece's northern neighbor, and to the powerful monarchical tradition that culminated in the reign of Alexander the Great, who from 333 B.C. to his death in 323 B.C. created a vast Empire which included Hellas within it, and reached to India. It is significant to our ebook, that even inside the turbulent fractures that disturbed the Greek polis during the fourth century, two of the greatest Western philosophers unfolded extensive commentaries on the nature of life. Plato died in 348 B.C., while his pupil Aristotle died in 322 B.C. It seems that turmoil can be a condition of reflection, for only when the confident fabric of social and personal life is broken does the mind turn in on itself and ask what has happened.

*I know not how I may seem to others, but to myself I am but a small child wandering upon the vast shores of knowledge, every now and then finding a small bright pebble to content myself with. Plato*

**Life of Plato.** Plato was born in 428 B.C., and was thus a young man during the Peloponnesian War, the public teaching of Socrates, and many of the greatest achievements of Greek tragedy and comedy. Born into a distinguished family, he naturally gravitated to the intellectually intense public life of central Athens, where he encountered the Sophists, and became a friend of the forty-years older Socrates, a conspicuous public figure and a contentious but admired gadfly of the society. Drawn to Socrates for his wit, wisdom, and daring, Plato dedicated his own earliest writing—for he was from the start a thinker and man of letters—to dramatizing the implications of the death of Socrates. (Plato's *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Euthyphro* all treat of that death.) With those texts, and others, Plato launched a career of dialogue writing which was to grow in richness and depth until the end of his life. *The Republic* (389 B.C.) is arguably Plato's most realized and influential work. (We will have to content ourselves with a few references to other works.) He was by no means only active in writing, however. In 388 B.C. he traveled throughout Sicily and Italy, returning to Athens the following year to a period of intense writing—the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium* and other dialogues were composed at this time—only to return again to Sicily in 367 B.C. and again in 361 B.C., at the invitation of Dionysius II. The purpose of these visits was to make a philosopher-king—the ideal ruler in Plato's *Republic*—out of the young ruler of Syracuse. The results were hugely unsatisfactory, and Plato finally returned home to Greece, to care for and direct the extraordinary 'first University in the West,' the *Academy* of which he was the founder. He worked there, tutoring students of such global significance as Aristotle, until his death. (Interestingly enough the Academy itself survived all manner of geopolitical turmoil, to remain intact until 529 A.D., when the Emperor Justinian closed it down.) It was while

directing the Academy, in the last twenty years of his life, that Plato wrote the deepest of his dialogues—*The Theatetus*, *The Sophist*, *The Timaeus*, *The Laws*.

The analytic trend, in which we have found the signature of Greek philosophy, beginning with the Milesians, developed alongside the practice of question-asking—which from the start we contrasted to the accumulative, generative thought practices of the epic poetic tradition. We have seen that the Milesian penchant for questioning the essential components of the universe translated, in Socrates—and through a formative tradition linking Socrates to his Milesian background—into a remorseless querying of individuals on issues of ethical values. That social turn of Socrates was always strong in Plato, for whom the dialogue form was naturally a dramatization of kinds of relations among individuals. With Plato, the dialogue form becomes a springboard into ever widening philosophical inquiries, *epistemological* (how do we know?), *metaphysical* (of what ultimate sort must reality be, for us to live it as we do?), *aesthetic* (is there such a thing as beauty itself, apart from beautiful objects?) Ultimately, the Platonic dialogue inquired into the intelligible foundations (the Forms) of the meaningfulness of the world we inhabit. Plato's depth and ingenuity, in tracking these fundamental issues of philosophy, led one of the twentieth century's great thinkers, Alfred North Whitehead, to say that all Western philosophy subsequent to Plato was a series of footnotes to Plato. One of the most accessible and influential of Plato's dialogues, *The Republic*, will give us the idea of Plato's depth and artistry. In that dialogue he uses Socrates as his mouthpiece—a Socrates far different from the Socrates we see in the *Apology*—to lead the lengthy discussion into the deepest nooks and crannies of political philosophy. What makes this discussion of the ideal state unique is that in order to ground the very idea of that state the argument must be ramified enough to include the Forms, the ultimate principles of justice, reason, and beauty. We are as far from the Milesian areas of questioning as we are from the level on which politics and the polis are discussed today.

## **Herodotus** (484 B.C.-425 B.C.)

Herodotus wrote the first significant history of Greece and of his travels both in Greece and in other parts of the Eastern Mediterranean. Is he the father of history or, as some ancient critics claimed, 'the father of lies'?

By contemporary standards it might seem that epic, lyric, and drama clearly belong to the literary imagination, while questions could be raised about philosophy and history. I hope that we quelled such doubts about 'philosophy,' by showing that it rose from an inquiry tradition seeking the central meaning of reality, and that right through Socrates and Plato Greek philosophy belonged to a restless inquiry distinctively targeting both the nature of physical reality and then, at its peak, the nature of ethical relationships, knowledge, and logic. Is not this kind of inquiry a close kin to the kind of 'address to the world' fundamental to epic, lyric, and drama, all of which propose, and observe, models of the world we live in? And is not history just such an inquiry? The Greek verb *historeo*, *I inquire*, lies at the root of the word 'historia,' and while today, among scholars of history, there may be fierce debate about whether history is a science or simply a special kind of language, there is no doubt that for the Greeks of Herodotus' time history was just one more offspring of the Muses. Clio, after all, was the Muse of History, and took her place beside her sisters, all of them wellheads of the arts.

The underlying purpose of Herodotus' work is to create a history of his time, with an end point at the Battles of Marathon (490 B.C.) and Salamis (480 B.C), that is at the point where the Greeks triumph over the vast Persian Empire. To achieve that historization of his own time Herodotus concentrates on the peripeties of the Persian monarchy from the time of Cyrus in the mid-sixth century to that of King Xerxes whose fleet the Greeks defeat at Salamis.

In constructing his history Herodotus digresses constantly, drawing on his own extensive travels in the Near East and Egypt, on travelers' tales, and on earlier Greek world historians, like Hecataeus. While his digressions are never pointless, and are almost always amusing, they contribute only indirectly to the construction of his overall history. It will be well to look at a sample of Herodotus' historical thinking.

**How Herodotus thinks.** We need to consider the kind of mind work Herodotus carries out, in presenting his *History*. Take the story of Gyges and Candaules. (Book One, the beginning.) What does the telling of that story have to do with furthering Herodotus' history timeline? Start with this. Herodotus wants to locate King Croesus of Lydia in terms of his own lineage. Why? To construct the true architecture of known time. And why Croesus? Because Croesus is the King who, by capturing and subduing Greek city states in Asia Minor, first generated conflict between the Greeks and their neighbors to the East. So how to present the line of descent that led from the first Lydian King, Candaules, 'down to' Croesus, more than a century later? The way Herodotus 'chooses'—in fact the thought movement congenial to him throughout his history—is to start by dramatizing the events that led to the kingly transition from the first Lydian monarch, Candaules, to his successor, Gyges. We are talking, of course, about the 'story' of Gyges and Candaules. Herodotus moves the timeline through such 'episodes.' As his history advances he accumulates tale upon tale, each making its own point, but the sequence of tales more or less reliably returning to the Greek Persian axis/issue which underlies the entire work.

**What do you think about this kind of historicizing?** The kind of story-writing history



which Herodotus loves, is one way of building a time line. In a sense the tale of Gyges and Candaules is a 'date' on a list of time periods. In every sense of the word 'imagination' Herodotus is one with the other 'literary minds' who create ancient Greek culture. What do you think of this 'method'? Is it an effective way of getting in touch with the truth of the past? Whatever your response you will agree that the approach Herodotus adopts, toward reporting the history of his own culture, is fully in line with the literary/imaginative processes of thought which have governed the Greek expression we canvas in this ebook.

**Thucydides** (460 B.C.-395 B.C.)

**Who was Thucydides?** This observer of the grandeur and fall of the Athenians, during the second half of the fifth century, served as a general in the north of Greece, but apart from that evidence of his personal experience is known almost solely for one book, his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. In that great work—some would say it, not Herodotus' *History*, was the first true History--Thucydides proved himself a drier, more analytical, more philosophical historian than his predecessor and model, Herodotus. Thucydides probes the causes and resolutions that created the Peloponnesian War—up to the year 411 B.C.-- in the last thirty years of the fifth century. He writes his history largely by means of constructed (remembered, reported) speeches, by a careful sifting of evidence—in conscious difference from Herodotus, who, as we have seen, was often considered the 'father of lies'—and by sticking closely to his topic, unlike Herodotus, who was the master of the digression which fitted into his plan. And Thucydides develops a narrative style, as well as a view of mankind, which makes him a true cross between the epic creator and a seasoned and relatively pessimistic judge of human affairs.

**How does Thucydides establish a history?** Thucydides creates his history out of defined vignettes in which events of the Peloponnesian war are converted into cameos, usually with little, or very spare, commentary from the author. (As a participant general in the army of Athens, Thucydides sticks to the detail of military affairs, and—in this like Herodotus, too—makes almost no reference to himself, with the exception of a famed reference, in the third person, to a certain Thucydides who 'fought in the north.')

*For the whole earth is the tomb of famous men; not only are they commemorated by columns and inscriptions in their own country, but in foreign lands there dwells also an unwritten memorial of them, graven not on stone but in the hearts of men. Make them your examples, and, esteeming courage to be freedom and freedom to be happiness, do not weigh too nicely the perils of war. Funeral Oration of Pericles.*

**The Melian debate; The Funderal Oration of Pericles.** Thucydides was a master of reported speech. After the debacle of the Sicilian Expedition, in 415 B.C., the Athenians decided to add to their Aegean possessions, and proposed a takeover of the small island of Melos, which had so far maintained a neutral posture in the Peloponnesian War, despite historical ties to Sparta. It will be worth your while to examine Thucydides' account of the debate between the Athenian envoys to the Melians, and the leading Melians who are chosen to discuss the Athenian proposals. The dry reliance on force, which the Athenian representative displays, is 'brilliant':

*Melian: 'But must we be your enemies? Would you not receive us as friends if we are neutral and remain at peace with you?'*

*Athenian: 'No, your enmity does not injure us as much as your friendship; for your enmity is in the eyes of our subjects a demonstration of our power, your friendship of our weakness.'*

Never has *Machtpolitik* been so simply and clearly dissected. And so goes the description of the Melian episode, the interlocutors reduced to namelessness by Thucydides, and the ruthless determination of the Athenians screwed tighter and tighter, but in the coldest possible language of diplomacy. It is no wonder that many 'modern historians' have turned back to Homer, for the model of the Thucydidean historian: as you will have seen, the *Iliad*

is full of formally expressive delegations, carefully crafted hard-talk, and brutal resolutions. It hardly needs to be said that, at the end of the Melian debate, the Melian males were slaughtered and the women and children sold into slavery.

**The Funeral Oration of Pericles.** It being the custom in Athens that the elected leader of the Athenians should provide an oration for the military dead, each year, Pericles undertook this challenge after the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War (431 B.C.). At that time Athens seemed manifestly in control of military affairs in Greece; the Long Walls were strong protection against invasion, trade was vigorous, culture was at its peak. You will want to contrast the tone of Pericles—as Thucydides recreates it—with the tone of the Athenian representative at Melos; cold, logical, crushing. The mastery of such tone differences is the mark of Thucydides' brilliant inner ear for the sounds of history, and the true indicator of his allegiance to the tradition of epic narrative in Greece.

*Period Four The Hellenistic Age (400-300 B.C.)*

*ORATORY*

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Topic 42 Aeschines

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*PHILOSOPHY*

Topic 44 Aristotle: Poetics, Physics, Metaphysics

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*POETRY AND DRAMA*

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## **Isocrates** (446-338 B.C.)

With the rise of democracy in the fifth century the Athenians moved into a phase of citizen participation—a great distance from the Heroic or even the Archaic stages of social shaping among the Hellenes. Even in the archaic age, that of Solon and Archilochos or Sappho, for instance, Greek society was deeply stratified, and the gap between citizens and helots/women/slaves was huge. The new politically aware citizenry begin to involve itself in the legalities of private rights and wrongs, the social values that underlay the structure of the laws, and property issues such as emerge in a settled civic community. With these developments the importance of the law was by the end of the fifth century to make Athens into a synonym for litigiousness. It was into such a setting that the oratorical tradition found its way to the center of society, providing, as it did, an artistic form of legal self-defence.

Isocrates was a central figure in the growth of Athenian oratory, and made his first strong mark with his speech 'Against the Sophists,' despite the fact that he himself had been inspired by such Sophists as Gorgias and Prodicus. He was, however, not a great speaker, lacked confidence in his courtroom presence, and found his true *métier* as a *logographer*, a greatly in demand writer of speeches for those who needed to represent themselves in court. Twenty one orations of his many passed down to us from the Romans. The finest of his speeches are addressed not only to clients in court but to his fellow citizens, before whom he spoke with an eloquence designed to call them to a sense of their national unity:

*Emulate, not those who have most widely extended their dominion, but those who have made best use of the power they already possess; and believe that you will enjoy the utmost happiness, not if you rule over the whole world at the price of fears and dangers and baseness, but rather if, being the man you should be, and continuing to act as at the present moment, you set your heart on moderate achievements and fail in none of them.*

## **Aeschines** (389 B.C.-314 B.C.)

Aeschines, whose life span overlaps that of Plato and Aristotle, belongs fully to the fourth century, and to a cultural environment which is no longer the fresh first blossom of *polis* society, such as we experience it in the great age of drama and the Parthenon, but of a new age of internal politics, growing multiculturalism, and naked ambition with great talent to back it up. Aeschines entered this eristic cultural milieu modestly, as the son of a school teacher who provided him the model of industry and commitment, then served with honor on the military front, eventually finding himself drawn into politics, where the challenges and rewards of the society were lodged, and in later life—the story is a long one—founded a school of rhetoric and oratory on the island of Rhodes. The chief geopolitical issue facing the Athenians of the time, as well as the Spartans and other Greek city states, was how to control the rising power of Philip of Macedon, the Father of Alexander the Great, and himself a candidate for hegemony over the whole of Hellas. Among the rival political candidates for attention in the Athenian polity were Aeschines and his more famous opponent, the orator Demosthenes. As it turned out, the efforts of Aeschines, to attack one of Demosthenes' allies and friends, Timarchus, turned into one of the most famous speeches left to us from Aeschines, and, incidentally, a fascinating glimpse into one view of pederasty, a practice Plato had defended with a special subtlety, but which Aeschines abhorred. The following passage gives the flavor of an Aeschinean attack:

*See now, fellow citizens, how unlike to Timarchus were Solon and those men of old whom I mentioned a moment ago. They were too modest to speak with the arm outside the cloak, but this man not long ago, yes, only the other day, in an assembly of the people threw off his cloak and leaped about like a gymnast, half naked, his body so reduced and befouled through drunkenness and lewdness that right-minded men, at least, covered their eyes, being ashamed for the city, that we should let such men as he be our advisers.*

Aeschines's assault on Timarchus turned the tide, and drove the man into exile.

## **Demosthenes** (384 B.C.-322 B.C.)

We have seen already that the growth of oratory was an important element in the increasingly public, litigious, and politically complex society of first the classical century, and then of the more modern fourth century which is the golden period of Greek oratory and philosophy. It was into the center of this kind of fervent political/cultural environment that Demosthenes grew up.

He was the son of a prosperous swordmaker, and grew up comfortably and well educated. (From early in life he studied the texts of great predecessor orators.) At the age of twenty he faced his first legal/oratorical challenge. His Father having passed on, guardians were appointed to care for Demosthenes' inheritance, but as it happened they squandered all but a small remnant of the inherited money, slaves, and possessions. At the age of twenty Demosthenes undertook to recover his due inheritance, and successfully prevailed in an Athenian law court. From that moment he found his vocation, and yet he was not yet filled with a mission, nor was he ever, actually, to be a great extempore speaker. (His preference was for carefully prepared written texts.) He turned to the role of *logographer*, which, as we have seen, was the job of preparing legal cases for others, who would read, in court, the texts lawyers like Demosthenes put before them. By 354 B.C., however, Demosthenes had been drawn out into the public light by the increasing pressure of politics; Athens was called on to resist the encroaching Macedonian threat from northern Greece, and especially the power hunger of King Philip. From 354, when Demosthenes delivered his first 'Philippic,' an attack on Philip who seemed voracious to swallow Athens, Demosthenes emerged as a forceful public figure. From that point on his oratorical skills were blended with political intensity, and indeed that blend seems to have provided the *je ne sais quoi* which rendered him the ultimate in reputation for oratory, and the figure to whom posterity turned as to the finest of speakers.

The coda to this tale further deepens the drama of Demosthenes. After Philip's death, his son Alexander unleashed a subordinate, Antipater, to get rid of the thorn that Demosthenes was. Antipater moved in on Athens, pursued Demosthenes, and in the end this greatest of Greek orators killed himself.

**Aristotle:** *Poetics* (384-322 B.C.)

Aristotle, the premier student at Plato's Academy, and himself the formal founder of a University, the Lyceum, wrote on all subjects known in his time—from metaphysics to the parts of animals—and has arguably exerted more influence than any other Greek thinker on mediaeval, Renaissance, and modern thought in the West. Among his vast body of writings two are devoted specifically to aesthetic questions, the Rhetoric—an analysis of the art of effective oratory—and the Poetics. Each text has kept its vigor into our own time, and can continue to provoke fundamental discussion of the nature of the arts of language.

The Poetics (or the study of the art of making in language; poiesis, making, derives from the verb 'to make,' and means poetry, the making art) is concerned with creation in language, with special emphasis on drama, which for Aristotle was the central verbal art. Aristotle looks at the origins of comedy and tragedy—which we have discussed earlier in connection with the Athenian playwrights—and then turns close attention onto the construction of the tragic drama—we have lost his writings on comedy—both analyzing the components of the art and formulating principles of value.

His analysis of Greek tragedy—for of course his only examples are the dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, which are a century into his past—finds that the essential dramatic elements, in order of importance, are plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle—the visual of the play. The plot is central for it is the backbone and significance of the drama, and Aristotle devotes attention to the construction of the most effective plot. For him the greatest drama was Oedipus the King, of Sophocles. One reason for his judgment: we are enabled here to see the utterly cogent fall of a great man from power to defeat, and to appreciate the organic movement by which that fall emerges from the inside development of the plot itself. (In general, as you can appreciate, his preferred dramatist was Sophocles, his critique often leveled at Euripides.) From this account you can also appreciate his account of catharsis, as the highest effect to be achieved by the experience of a tragic drama: the arousing of pity and fear and the consequent purifying of them, on the occasion of watching a powerful protagonist fall from the heights to the depths.

**Physics.** The reader of this ebook on Greek literature will have wondered, long before this, whether literature as such is what we are studying. While he/she might readily have accepted Homer, Pindar, or Archilochos, he/she would have felt already, in reading Solon or Heracleitus or Parmenides, that the ground definition of literature was shifting. By the time the reader came to the orators, or to Socrates, the doubts would have grown even greater. Now we have arrived at Aristotle's *Physics*! Is that literature? What does literature mean here? Had the Greeks a different concept of literature from modern Westerners?

The ancient Greeks had no word corresponding to our word *literature*. (*Techne*, an art or skill, was the general term covering the notion of what we would call 'the arts,' but for the Greeks such a term as *techne* would cover many skills, for instance saddle making or carpentry, which we would not include in at least our notion of the 'fine arts.')

Thus we have found, yes, that visionary philosophers write in hexameters, and, in Plato, we have found a philosopher, who wrote in prose, who went more deeply into metaphorical thinking than any poet had done. Now we arrive at Aristotle, a philosopher in prose—the texts we have from him are basically lecture notes for the University he founded—but a philosopher whose thought was to prove dynamic for some of the greatest (and most poetic) theology of the



centuries to follow, and who was to be the poetic guide for Dante, in *The Divine Comedy* (14<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) Are we willing to include Aristotle's *Physics* with 'literature'?

And what soaring ideas do we see in the *Physics*? We read of final causes, potentiality and actuality, the eternality of the universe, and the Prime Mover of that universe: we are taking a journey, if in a 'prosaic' tone, to the highest registers of what preoccupies the greatest literatures, *Faust*, *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*. While Plato moves graciously, if intricately, from the individual to the principles of knowing and to the sources of intelligibility, Aristotle scrutinizes, in the *Physics*, a natural world the inner growth and meaning of which is the very stuff our existence is made of.

**Metaphysics.** Aristotle nowhere calls the present work *Metaphysics*; it acquired its name from those late Hellenistic scholars who first assembled the works of Aristotle. They edited and included the *Physics*, which we have just considered, then placed after it another text which, because it came *after* the *Physics*—*meta* (*after*) *ta physika*—acquired the name we now give it, the *Metaphysics*, the text following the *Physics*. That this accident of editing turns out to be appropriate becomes evident. The *Physics* is concerned with coming into being, in nature, with the principles of potentiality and actuality as the profile of change, and with forms which confer intelligibility. The *Metaphysics* takes up all these issues, but transfers them from the observation of nature to the realm of being, as it is logically analyzed. The purpose of the *Metaphysics*, viewed in terms of the history of Greek thought, is to provide a reconciliation between the evident changeability of the world and the meaning-giving stability of it. This reconciliation was already the central challenge for Heraclitus and Parmenides—who split over whether all is flux or all is immutability which only *seems* to include change; as it was the challenge for Plato, who met the perplexity of change with his Theory of Ideas, to which we have earlier referred. Aristotle provides reconciliation through his careful analysis of substance, of cause, of essence, and of universality. Without recourse to independent substantiating principles—like Plato's Theory of Ideas—Aristotle derives the dynamic of being from its own inherent dialectic, guided by a First Cause and a Final Cause. His intricate thought-system provided a launching pad for many later adventures in thought, most notably the frameworking of the *Summa Theologica*, that architectonic achievement of Thomas Aquinas, a capstone of mediaeval Catholic thought.

Our references back to Plato—himself quite literally a poet of ideas—and to those visionary philosopher/poets like Heraclitus and Parmenides—should justify our inclusion of Aristotle's scrupulous analysis in a brief ebook summary of Greek literature. From the beginning in Homer, Greek creative expression is an inquiry into the meaning of meaning, in a world where flux and accident seem to carry out a ballet with the permanent principles of reality.

## **Xenophon** (450 B.C.-354 B.C.)

Xenophon was born near Athens, of a well to do family, and grew up during the creative and politically tumultuous years of the second half of the fifth century. We know him today largely for his *Anabasis*, or his memoir on the trial of Socrates, and for a text on horsemanship, but he was a soldier general, and man of letters who wrote about many aspects of his own time, from economics to military affairs.

In 401 Xenophon was recruited to lead an expedition to Asia Minor, to support the army of the Persian King Cyrus, who was attempting to overthrow his brother Artaxerxes, who had wrested the throne from him. Xenophon and his men traveled with Cyrus to the interior of Asia Minor where the King and his brother fought a bloody battle—to a standstill. In the battle, Cyrus was killed, with the result that, as it turned out, Xenophon and his men were stranded, unable to advance in their (subsidized) mission, and several thousand miles from their home in Greece. Xenophon and two other leaders were left with the responsibility of shepherding the group—the Ten Thousand as they came to be called—back through the mountains of Asia Minor to the Mediterranean, from where they could reach their homes. The *Anabasis*—the 'going up' through the mountains toward the sea—is Xenophon's account, written later, of the march he and his men made. Among the best known words of the texts is the cry 'Thalatta, thalatta,' 'the sea,' 'the sea' which the men bellowed when eventually they saw the Mediterranean before them.

Upon return to Greece, Xenophon was exiled from Athens—perhaps for having fought in a national battle on the Spartan side—and then found the time to write the account we discuss here. Ultimately he was pardoned and returned to Athens, and in the course of his later years wrote a *Memoir* of the trial and death of Socrates, a volume on horsemanship—he was a country gentleman—and a treatise on economics.

*The true test of a leader is whether his followers will adhere to his cause from their own volition, enduring the most arduous hardships without being forced to do so, and remaining steadfast in the moments of greatest peril.*

## **Epicurus** 341 B.C.-270 B.C.

Epicurus was born in Anatolia, taken to Athens as a youth, then moved to Lesbos, and ultimately returned to Athens, after maturing a philosophy and a set of pupils; he established his own school, The Garden, near the Stoa in the center of the city. There he became an influential, though quiet and withdrawn, leader of thought.

The thought of Epicurus derives in part from that of Democritus, and before him Leucippus, strict materialists for whom the structure of reality is determined by the movement of atoms in the void, and who believed in absolute determinism. For Epicurus, too, material atoms constitute reality, assuming both the gross forms visible in the familiar features of landscape, and the infinitely fine forms constituting the soul. Unlike his predecessors, Epicurus believed that the movement of these atoms was random, prone to 'swerve' and thus the foundation of our free will, which derives from the unpredictability of our mental environment. Though our sensations are accurate guides to the way things are, they cannot penetrate to the further realms of ontology; the gods, for example, should be treated with respect, but no deep relation to them is possible; what is possible, and this is the ground of Epicurus' renowned ethic, is to remain apart from pain, suffering, and exuberance, to live with modest pleasures and above all with friends, friendship (*philia*) being the highest of our pleasures. The other side to this corollary is that we should avoid the turmoils of the marketplace, and especially of politics, striving rather to retain a spirit of *ataraxia*, unshakeness, to the end, an end which is itself not fearful, for there is nothing after death except dissolution. The following, from a letter written by Epicurus to a friend on the last day of Epicurus' life, sums it up:

*I have written this letter to you on a happy day to me, which is also the last day of my life. For I have been attacked by a painful inability to urinate, and also dysentery, so violent that nothing can be added to the violence of my sufferings. But the cheerfulness of my mind, which comes from the recollection of all my philosophical contemplation, counterbalances all these afflictions.*

## **Theophrastus (371-287 B.C.)**

Theophrastus was born on the island of Lesbos—the home of Sappho—where he studied philosophy. From there he went to study philosophy in Athens, becoming a pupil of Plato, at the Academy, and then of Aristotle, at the Lyceum. With Aristotle Theophrastus formed a close personal connection; the two men traveled to the north of Greece, when Aristotle, the teacher of Alexander, went into exile to escape the anti-Macedonian mood in Athens. Upon Aristotle's death, Theophrastus was made director of the Lyceum—he also became the guardian of Aristotle's children---and at the Lyceum he became immensely popular, at one time supervising two thousand disciples, among whom was the playwright Menander.

The work of Theophrastus, as Lyceum Director, was astonishingly diverse, as was that of Aristotle. Theophrastus has been called the 'father of Botany,' for his extensive treatise on *The Causes of Plants*; he also wrote investigative treatises on a wide variety of topics--logic, metaphysics, physics--displaying the same kind of empirical fervor that drove Aristotle. (At his death at eighty-five Theophrastus complained that life was just beginning, and now he had to die.) Within this busy work setting we come upon the text for which Theophrastus is best known today, his *Characters*. This work consists of thirty sharp-edged portraits of distorted social types: the coward, the flatterer, the over-zealous, the tactless, the slanderer, the newsmonger, the surly...and on and on through the roster of the socially comic. The perspective is similar to that of the comedy of manners perspective in the English novel—Thackeray or Charles Dickens—and springs from a sharp eye for foibles combined, to some extent, with a dour world view. The deeper explanations of this treatise lie in Aristotle's own work; in his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle stresses the importance of normative behavior. For example, he thinks it proper to walk at a moderate pace, not exaggeratedly fast or slow. The example is simplistic. But in Aristotle the example is expanded into an entire ethic of proper, moderate behavior. That is where Theophrastus is coming from.

## **Menander (342 B.C.-292 B.C.)**

Menander was born to a prosperous Athenian family, and was privileged to move in influential social circles, where he had ample leisure to observe the ins and outs of big city social life. He was a prolific dramatist, one of the most prized of Greek writers, yet for all that he comes down to us in fragmentary condition. As recently as the eleventh century A.D. twenty two of Menanders' plays were known, in a Byzantine manuscript, but today only play, the *Dyskolos*, remains to us in its entirety.

The world view of Theophrastus' *Characters* is all over the work of Menander, who was probably his pupil. *The Characters*, as we have seen, are the byproduct of a society on show to itself, parading before itself those stylized stock figures of a sophisticated Hellenistic city open to observation. We have come a long way, sociologically, from the days of the Persian invasions, the tragedies of Aeschylus, the polis that Thucydides anatomized; and although the time separating Menander from that era is only a little over a century, we can see the huge growth of 'bourgeoisification' that has taken place in the intervening years. The typical plot of the Menander play bears out this change. We are in a world of stock plots: the type of them would be the kind of line we know from Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well* or *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: a young woman is seduced, a child born of the rape, the child abandoned, the villain disappears, the villain later re enters the life of the former maiden, the two are married—without knowing their mutual pasts--the child (now of marriage age) returns to the vicinity of her parents, her parents are made aware by chance comments of the hidden bond that joins them all, and a grand reconciliation brings light hearted harmony back to the world.

The world of Aristophanic comedy contains the same reconciliatory tweaks as that of Menander, but there the similarity stops. What in Aristophanes is hard hitting and sharp edged is in Menander light—though, as in the above plot-precis, it is dealing in social criticism. Aristophanes still remains proximate to the archaic world of rural festival and primitive rite; while Menander is writing for a 'Broadway audience.'

**Callimachus** 310 B.C.-240 B.C.

The poetry of Menander, and of Herondas (#68) can be taken, with that of Callimachus, to remind us of how deeply different the poetry of Hellenistic Greece was, from those early lyricists, like Archilochos or Sappho, who wrote two hundred years earlier, and in the first flower of Greek personal expression. (The earlier poets were fresh and bold in their emotions; the Hellenistic poets are more sophisticated and more self-conscious.)

Callimachus is a good example of this cultural change; a poet of immense culture, a scholar and librarian as well as a poet, he belongs to the post-classical world of classical Greece.

Callimachus was born in the Greek colony of Cyrene, in Libya. He was the scion of the first Greek royal family to have reigned in Africa, his line having been founded and settled in Cyrene for eight generations before him. From youth on he was learned and fastidious, conscious of his fine background, and hating, as he put it, 'all common things.' It was thus appropriate that he should have found his way into the most culturally rich institution of his time, the Library at Alexandria. Having been appointed the second director of the Library, under the patronage of Ptolemy II, the Greek Pharaoh of Egypt, Callimachus composed his lengthiest work, the *Pinakes*, which was a catalogue of the several hundred thousand papyrus scrolls in the Library. (The Library was fully staffed with sub librarians, crammed with international scholars, and a home especially to scientists and inventors.) The actual work of Callimachus himself is left largely in fragments, and although he is said to have written eight hundred 'works,' there remain only six hymns, sixty four epigrams, and bits and pieces on papyri. (You will have been learning, throughout this ebook catalogue, how slender a thread holds us to many of the formative texts of Ancient Greek literature.) The following may be representative of the kind of brief, pithy text Callimachus left us:

*But twelve short years you lived, my son,  
Just twelve short years, and then you died:  
And now your life's brief course is run,  
This grave a father's hopes doth hide.*

*Period Five Later Greek Texts*

*MIME AND EPIC*

Topic 50 Herondas

Topic 51 Theocritus

Topic 52 Apollonius of Rhodes

*GEOGRAPHY*

Topic 53 Strabo

*BIOGRAPHY AND MEMOIR*

Topic 54 Plutarch

*MEDITATION*

Topic 55 Marcus Aurelius

*PHILOSOPHY*

Topic 56 Epictetus

Topic 57 Diogenes Laertius

### Herondas (3<sup>rd</sup> Cent. BC)

From the island of Cos, Herondas moved to Alexandria, and though we know virtually nothing about his life, we have a sure sense of his literary placing, in the elegant and sophisticated verbal climate of his contemporaries, Theocritus, Callimachus, and Menander. These writers are all distant from the epic or classical tradition, though all are keenly aware of, and playing with, meters and allusions from those earlier literary worlds. The form in which Herondas chose to reflect his time was the *mimiambos*, a satirical mime or playlet of a kind favored, already in the fifth century, by Sophron—reputedly a stimulus and source for Plato. Not only did Herondas work from the example of these satirical pieces, but he wrote in an archly archaic Greek harking back to the language of sixth century lyric poets. The result is a self-conscious highly literary genre of Alexandrian mime, with the added Theophrastian dimension, which will appear in the sample lines below. (Theophrastus, of course, had introduced the notion of the 'typical' character, in his *Characters*.)

Metriche, who speaks below, is a classic go-between, doing her best to set up a young woman with a good looking guy.

*It is the way of young women to banter, but I don't see how you yourself can do it. For how long, now, my child, have you been widowed, wearing out your empty bed alone? Ten months have passed since Mandris departed for Egypt, and he has not sent you a single line. The house of the Goddess is there; everything, everything, spectacles, philosophers, young boys, temples of twin gods, an excellent King, a museum, wine all the good things one could desire, women without number—by the Virgin, Mistress of Hades, the sky is not so glorified by bearing so many stars—and lovely as in the time when the goddesses came for Paris to judge their beauty—(may they not hear me saying this)—while you, u happy one: how must you feel as you sit warming your chair? Thus, without you suspecting it, age approaches and your bright youth wastes itself in ashes. Look elsewhere and change your thoughts; for a few days be joyous with some other who is also joyous. A ship on a single anchor has no sure mooring...*



## Theocritus (1<sup>st</sup> half of 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C.)

Theocritus was a contemporary of Herondas, and born in Syracuse in Sicily. From there he went to Alexandria, the site of the Great Library founded by the Greek speaking Ptolemies in honor of Alexander of Macedon. (Both Callimachus and Apollonius of Rhodes (#70) were Head Librarians there; an indicator both of the scholarly nature of Hellenistic poetry, and of the shift in Greek cultural energy from the mainland of Hellas to Egypt and Asia Minor.) Theocritus too gravitated to the Alexandrian cultural matrix, not as a figure of the library itself, but as a client of rich and powerful patrons, who were themselves a sign of the new literary climate of the Hellenistic world. (Many of Theocritus's poems, idylls and bucolics, in fact concern the greatness of useful rulers—such as Hiero of Syracuse, from whom Theocritus expects largesse, or the greatness of such semi-divine rulers as Ptolemy II of Egypt, whom Theocritus praises for his generosity to poets.) The most memorable, and influential, of Theocritus' poems were bucolics, in which country men and women---highly stylized and placed in an idealized country setting—woo and chatter in complex and sophisticated dialogues, generated by those complex meters that the erudite Theocritus had inherited from a long matured tradition. Some of his best mimes pick up the conversational language of his time, like the following in which two neighbor ladies prepare an outing together:

GORG0 (*with her maid Etychis at the door, as the maid Eunoa opens it*)  
Praxinoa at home?

PRAXINOA (*running forward*)

Dear Gorgo! at last! she is at home. I quite thought you'd forgotten me. (*to the maid*) Here, Eunoa, a chair of the lady, and a cushion on it.

GORG0 (*refusing the cushion*)

No, thank you, really.

PRAXINOA

Do sit down.

GORG0 (*sitting*)

O what a silly I was to come! What with the crush and the horses, Praxinoa, I've scarcely got here alive. It's all big boots and people in uniform. And the street was never-ending, and you can't think how far your house is along it.

## **Apollonius of Rhodes** (First half of third Century B.C.)

Apollonius was a scholar and Librarian of the Great Library at Alexandria. Though few details are known of him, it appears he was born in Egypt, was of prominent family and well educated, and was a student of the poet and Librarian Callimachus, who was his instructor of rhetoric. The post of the Head Librarian at Alexandria was a high honor, conferred by the reigning Ptolemy in Egypt, and Apollonius was well qualified for his adventures in scholarship. It will have to strike the reader, of this ebook, that though we have met fastidious philosophers like Aristotle, law givers like Solon, or historians like Thucydides, it is only here, with the Alexandrian period, that we come on the first Greek scholars, editors and commentators on the Greek cultural past. He wrote the first recorded scholarly monograph on Homer, as well as scholarly commentaries on Archilochus and Hesiod—though these have perished. His major work, however, is the *Argonautica*, an epic about the expedition of Jason to recover the Golden Fleece, and, as it happened, to encounter the sorceress Medea and bring her back to Greece—with tragic results. This work collates themes from Euripides' *Medea* and any number of motifs, characters, and plot developments from Homer's *Iliad*; the result is a new kind of 'Hellenistic epic,' far less primal and universal than Homer, far richer in erudite commentary, academic digressions, and pathological inquiries—as into the psychology of thwarted love. The result is an epic half the size of Homer's, four books and 6,000 lines of dactylic hexameters. In the following passage we see Jason, a new Odysseus as it were, approaching and entering a city in Colchis.

*And he went on his way to the city like to a bright star, which maidens, pent up in new-built chambers, behold as it rises above their homes, and through the dark air it charms their eyes with its fair red gleam and the maid rejoices, love-sick for the youth who is far away amid strangers, for whom her parents are keeping her to be his bride; like to that star the hero trod the way to the city. And when they had passed within the gates and the city, the women of the people surged behind them, delighting in the stranger, but he with his eyes fixed on the ground fared straight on, till he reached the glorious palace of Hypsipyle...*

## **Strabo (64 B.C.-24 A.D.)**

Strabo was a Greek geographer, geologist, and traveler to whom we are indebted for much of what we know of the geographical world view of his time, as well as for closely observational reports from his many travels in the Eastern Mediterranean—in fact as far as the Upper Nile or to the Hindu Kush. Strabo came from an affluent family from Pontus, in today's Turkey, but at a young age moved to Rome, then returned to Nysus, in Asia Minor, where he continued his education in a distinguished school of grammar and rhetoric. He was throughout these years, and throughout his busy life, working at the seven volumes of his *Geographica*, which we think were published for the first time around 10 A.D. This work-- maps, travel reports, comments on landscape and geological change, astronomical commentary--was recovered and translated in the Renaissance, and gave new substance to our knowledge of Greco-Roman stages of cultural development. The case of Astronomy marks the advancing contribution of Strabo. His predecessor Eratosthenes, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C., on whom he relied for the first scientific description of the visible sky, did the best he could from a *scientific* standpoint, while Strabo looked at the nomenclatures and descriptions of the heavenly bodies *anthropologically*, as expressions of the beliefs and stories of the various cultures who have named the parts of the heavens. The nature of his thinking is evident below:

*...There are no trees here, but only the vineyards where they produce the Katakekaumene wines which are by no means inferior from any of the wines famous for their quality. The soil is covered with ashes, and black in color as if the mountainous and rocky country was made up of fires. Some assume that these ashes were the result of thunderbolts and subterranean explosions, and do not doubt that the legendary story of Typhon takes place in this region.... However, it is not reasonable to accept that the whole country was burned down at a time as a result of such an event rather than as a result of a fire bursting from underground whose source has now died out. Three pits are called "Physas" and separated by forty stadia from each other. Above these pits, there are hills formed by the hot masses burst out from the ground as estimated by a logical reasoning.*

## **Plutarch** (46 A.D.-120 AD)

Plutarch was born in Boeotia—the home land of Hesiod—in the village of Chaeronia. His father was well to do and Plutarch was destined for a life of writing and travel, beginning with a period of study at Plato's Academy in Athens, from 61-74 A.D. In the course of traveling he twice visited Rome—which was by this time the metropolitan center for the Greeks, who had been conquered by the Romans—and became a Roman citizen. Despite constant travel, and citizenship in Rome, Plutarch served as a Priest of Apollo in the Temple of the Oracle at Delphi, served vigorously in local and national politics, and above all delighted in hosting distinguished guests at his family home—and from the comfort of his marble throne.

Plutarch was a voluminous writer, added to which, by luck, most of what he wrote was preserved intact. He was vigorous in both philosophy and in his series of biographies and memoirs, and is especially known for his *Parallel Lives*. In the *Parallel Lives* he writes substantial biographies of such ancient figures as Theseus or Solon or, closer in time, Alexander. In pairing a Greek with a Roman he is concerned to show the relevance and current living importance of the highest Ancient Greek achievers. Although he provides substantial 'historical information,' he writes as a moralist more than as a historian, concerning himself with the small lifestyle issues, tweaks of personal destiny, and evidences of character or weakness which go to compose the whole person.

The philosophical underpinning of these biographies lies in Plutarch's extensive commentaries on Plato, his axis in philosophy. He was particularly absorbed in Plato's *Timaeus*, which is a speculation on the origin of the cosmos. For the Plato, of this dialogue which was to be central to late Mediaeval and Renaissance thinking, the cosmos is born out of un-reason and chaos, but is transformed, by the Master Ordering Principle, into a dialogue of chaos with reason, between which principles there is continual struggle. One sees how this perspective plays into the ethic Plutarch deploys in his *Lives*.

Plutarch was a fountain of wise sayings—

*Let us carefully observe those good qualities wherein our enemies excel us; and endeavor to excel them, by avoiding what is faulty, and imitating what is excellent in them.*

## **Marcus Aurelius (121 A.D.-180 A.D.)**

Marcus Aurelius was born into a noble Roman family, and was then himself adopted, at age eighteen, by the Emperor Antoninus Pius. Through a series of deaths and surprising intra-familial opportunities, Marcus himself became Emperor, and ruled from 161-180 A.D.. In that position he found himself plunged into administrative duties, the tumult of which provoked his desire to understand and control himself. And such duties were not just the ordinary run of bureaucratic operations, for in the latter years of his reign the Roman Empire was starting to feel the impact of powerful pressures, a sweeping plague which devastated whole populations, the pressure of 'barbarian tribes' to the East of the Empire, uprisings in Egypt. These crisis situations obliged Marcus to be often out on campaign, pursuing enemies from camp to camp. That perambulatory and stressful setting was the frame for his principal writing, *The Meditations*, which was composed as jottings and notes to himself, during the years 170-180 A.D.

Stoicism underlies what consistency there is in this brilliant but disconnected series of 'meditations,' written in exquisite *koine* Greek by a Roman Emperor. The stress is everywhere on remaining true to your own nature, hearing the discipline of Providence behind every action, and putting duty and the pleasures of virtue before all else. A vision of cosmic order will reward patient attention to these moral behaviors.

*Words that everyone once used are now obsolete, and so are the men whose names were once on everyone's lips: Camillus, Caeso, Volusus, Dentatus, and to a lesser degree Scipio and Cato, and yes, even Augustus, Hadrian, and Antoninus are less spoken of now than they were in their own days. For all things fade away, become the stuff of legend, and are soon buried in oblivion. Mind you, this is true only for those who blazed once like bright stars in the firmament, but for the rest, as soon as a few clods of earth cover their corpses, they are 'out of sight, out of mind.' In the end, what would you gain from everlasting remembrance? Absolutely nothing. So what is left worth living for? This alone: justice in thought, goodness in action, speech that cannot deceive, and a disposition glad of whatever comes, welcoming it as necessary, as familiar, as flowing from the same source and fountain as yourself.*

**Epictetus** (55 A.D.-136 A.D.)

Epictetus was a Stoic philosopher, whose thoughts echo those of the Stoic school—Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus—all of the early to mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.—which gathered around the *Stoa poikile* in central Athens. (This school of thought has adherents to our day; it has, like the thinking of Epicurus, proven deeply influential through Western culture.) Epictetus himself was born in Asia Minor, as a slave, yet rapidly found ways to cope with his subordinate position; when freed he was able to found his own school, in Nicopolis in Epirus (Northwest Greece.) His writings have found their way to us in a large text, *The Discourses*, and in a compilation made from that text, *The Enchiridion* or *Handbook*.

The core of his philosophy turns around two concepts, *volition* (*prohaeresis*) and *impressions*, the maintenance of which proves the key to success in life. It is within our power to control our own lives, and to find peace within ourselves; all of this by the exercise of reason, which puts us in touch with the nature of the universe. (Epictetus 'believes in the existence of the God,' and particularly in the power of Zeus, who works as the principle of 'reason' in the world around us.) By exercising reason we are able to rise above the claims of our bodies, which are petty and unimportant, and to put ourselves in touch with the nature of things. By doing so we are able to adopt an appropriate attitude toward other human beings. Believing that the universe is benevolent, we can aid others to find their own suitable adjustments to the world we exist in. While stressing the importance of the volition, by which we put ourselves in touch with nature, and by effectively managing our sense and thought lives, our *impressions*, we are able to remain content in the midst of life's buffetings. What could be more activist than the following quote from Epictetus:

*Have you not hands, fool? Has not god made them for you? Sit down now and pray your nose may not run! Wipe it, rather, and do not blame god.*

## Diogenes Laertius 3<sup>rd</sup> Cent. A.D.

The reader who sequences the entries in this ebook from outset, with the Homeric Age, to the three post-Christian centuries, during which Greek was still an admired language, but Greek culture was subordinate to that of the conquering Romans, will see that the expressions of that culture have dwindled to scholarship, personal meditation (as we see, wonderfully, in Marcus Aurelius), to natural history, none of which were components of the high vigorous period of classical Greece. Diogenes Laertius, about whose life we know nothing, is a good example of this 'dwindling.'

From the first half of the third century A.D., we have Diogenes' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, which is a lengthy survey of what remained known, in his time, of the Greek philosophers we have been reviewing in this ebook. Diogenes is a priceless source of information, shallow and scanty though much of his work is, about his philosophical predecessors. He not only provides biographical tidbits and philosophical excerpts, but he provides a kind of organizational grid for understanding this tradition: in a word he divides the list of philosophers into *Ionian* (from Anaximander to Theophrastus) and *Italic* (for which Pythagoras and Epicurus mark the beginning and end.) A sample of his excerpt on Thales follows:

*After having been immersed in state affairs he applied himself to speculations in natural philosophy; though, as some people state, he left no writings behind him. For the book on Naval Astronomy, which is attributed to him, is said in reality to be the work of Phocus the Samian. But Callimachus was aware that he was the discoverer of the Lesser Bear; for in his Iambics he speaks of him thus:*

*And, he, 'tis said, did first compute the stars  
Which beam in Charles's wain, and guide the bark  
Of the Phoenician sailor o'er the sea.*

*According to others he wrote two books, and no more, about the solstice and the equinox; thinking that everything else was easily to be comprehended. According to other statements, he is said to have been the first who studied astronomy, and who foretold the eclipses and motions of the sun, as Eudemus relates in his history of the discoveries made in astronomy; on which account Xenophanes and Herodotus praise him greatly; and Heraclitus and Democritus confirm this statement.*