THE NEAR EASTERN INFLUENCE ON GREEK CULTURE

ORIENTALIZING REVOLUTION

IN THE EARLY ARCHAIC AGE

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PREFACE

The original version of this book was published in 1984 in *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*. I am grateful to Glen Bowersock for promoting an English translation. With a view to a larger public and in order to reflect the current state of scholarship, I have revised the book throughout and in some places expanded the argument.

My thesis about the indebtedness of Greek civilization to eastern stimuli may appear less provocative today than it did eight years ago. This change may be partly an effect of the original publication, but mainly it reflects the fact that classics has been losing more and more its status of a solitary model in our modern world. Yet it still seems worthwhile to help bridge the gaps between related fields of scholarship and to make available materials often neglected by one or another. Such an exercise may convey the excitement of unexpected discoveries even when it necessitates a fair amount of annotation.

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INTRODUCTION

"God's is the Orient, God's is the Occident" says the Koran.[1] Classical scholars have found it difficult to maintain such a balanced perspective and have tended instead to transform "oriental" and "occidental" into a polarity, implying antithesis and conflict. The Greeks had become aware of their own identity as separate from that of the "Orient" when they succeeded in repelling the attacks of the Persian empire. But not until much later, during the crusades, did the concept and the term *Orient* actually enter the languages of the West.[2] This fact hardly explains why even today it should be difficult to undertake unprejudiced discussion of connections between classical Greece and the East. But whoever tries will encounter entrenched positions, uneasiness, apology if not resentment. What is foreign and unknown is held at a distance by an attitude of wary defensiveness.

To a large extent this is the result of an intellectual development which began more than two centuries ago and took root especially in Germany. Increasing specialization of scholarship converged with ideological protectionism, and both constructed an image of a pure, classical Greece in splendid isolation. Until well into the eighteenth century, as long as philology was closely connected with theology, the Hebrew Bible naturally stood next to the Greek classics, and the existence of cross-connections did not present any problems. Jephtha's daughter and Iphigenia were interchangeable models even in the realm of opera; Iapetos

was traced to Japheth, the Kabeiroi to a Semitic designation for "great gods," and the "East" was found in the name of Kadmos the Phoenician, the "West" in the name of Europa.[3] In accordance with the *Odyssey* and Herodotus, "Phoenicians" were readily accepted as the link between East and West.

Then three new trends erected their own boundaries and collectively fractured the Orient–Greece axis. Philology broke free of theology—Friedrich August Wolf matriculated as *studiosus philologiae* at Göttingen in 1777[4]—and at the same time, with Johann Joachim Winckelmann, a new concept of classicism, one with rather pagan tendencies, asserted itself and came to attract high regard. Second, beginning with the work of Johann Gottfried Herder, the ideology of romantic nationalism developed, which held literature and spiritual culture to be intimately connected with an individual people, tribe, or race. Origins and organic development rather than reciprocal cultural influences became the key to understanding. In his reaction to Friedrich Creuzer's more universal model, Carl Otfried Müller gained considerable influence with his idea of "Greek tribal culture."[5] Precisely at the time when Jews were being granted full legal equality in Europe, national-romantic consciousness turned the trend against "orientalism" and thus gave anti-Semitism a chance. Third, linguistics scholars' discovery of "Indo-European"—the derivation of most European languages together with Persian and Sanskrit from a common archetype—at that time reinforced the alliance of Greek, Roman, and Germanic and thus banished the Semitic to another world.[6] It remained to defend the independence of the Greeks against the Indian relatives within the Indo-European family[7] in order to establish the concept of classical-national Greek identity as a self-contained and self-sufficient model of civilization which, at least in Germany, was to dominate the later nineteenth century.[8] Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's scornful assessment in 1884—"the peoples and states of the Semites and the Egyptians which had been decaying for centuries and which, in spite of the antiquity of their culture, were unable to contribute anything to the Hellenes other than a few manual skills, costumes, and im-

plements of bad taste, antiquated ornaments, repulsive fetishes for even more repulsive fake divinities"—is not representative of his work; but even later he maintained that the spirit of late antiquity stemmed "from the Orient and is the deadly enemy of true Hellenism."[9]

Behind the irascibility a certain insecurity seems to lurk. In fact the image of pure, self-contained Hellenism which makes its miraculous appearance with Homer had been overtaken in the nineteenth century by three groups of new discoveries: the reemergence of the ancient Near East and Egypt through the decipherment of cuneiform and hieroglyphic writing, the unearthing of Mycenaean civilization, and the recognition of an orientalizing phase in the development of archaic Greek art.

Classical philology greeted these discoveries with hesitancy. The Mycenaean period was gradually accepted as Greek prehistory,[10] and the final decipherment of Linear B as Greek confirmed this as fact. The development of Assyriology with the initial difficulties of reading cuneiform—Gilgamesh made his entrance in the guise of Izdubar[11]—could be viewed from a distance and with some condescension by an established branch of scholarship. When a few unmethodical studies tried to promote the fundamental importance of Babylonian literature in relation to world history, it was left to the theologians to refute the "pan-Babylonianists."[12] Only outsiders wrote about "Homer and Babylon."[13] Historians, on the other hand, had less difficulty opening themselves to the new dimensions of world history. Eduard Meyer began to publish his monumental *History of Antiquity* in 1884, a fundamental and in fact unique achievement.[14] The pursuit of this universal aim was continued by the collective undertaking of *The Cambridge Ancient History.*

By contrast, the anti-oriental reflex was to prevail in the field which lay much closer to Hellenists, in the assessment of the Phoenicians, who had of old been regarded as the active intermediaries between the Orient and Hellas. Julius Beloch, a scholar of genius flawed by his idiosyncrasies and overt anti-Semitism, promulgated the theory that the significance of the Phoenicians in early Greece was close to zero, that the "Phoe-

nician" Herakles of Thasos was no less of a fantasy than the mythical Phoenician Kadmos.[15] Instead, ancient Asia Minor was found to be of special importance, where soon Indo-Europeans were to appear, with the decipherment of the Hittite language. A barrier was erected against the Semitic.

Yet the marked impact of "the oriental" on Greek art between the geometric and the archaic periods—an impact made evident by imported objects as well as by new techniques and characteristic motifs of artistic imagery—could not be disregarded, at least after Fredrik Poulsen's book was published in 1912.[16] Even expert archaeologists, however, sometimes appear to feel uncomfortable about this fact and indeed advise against using the expression "the orientalizing period."[17] The foreign elements remain subject to a policy of containment: There is hardly a standard textbook that has oriental and Greek objects depicted side by side; many of the oriental finds in the great Greek sanctuaries have long remained—and some still remain—unpublished. The fact that Olympia is the most significant location for finds of eastern bronzes, richer in this respect than all the Middle Eastern sites, is seldom mentioned.

In Germany in the period between the two world wars a new hermeneutic approach promoted concentration on the individual, "internal" form and style in the interpretation of cultural achievements, to the detriment of outward influence. Archaeology thus achieved a deeper understanding of the archaic style and in fact discovered afresh the geometric style; historians such as Helmut Berve wished to renounce "universal" history in favor of Hellenism.[18] The joint work of Franz Boll and Carl Bezold in the arcane field of astrology remained a happy but isolated phenomenon. Another specialty which failed to attract general notice was the discovery by Otto Neugebauer that the "Pythagorean theorem" had been known and used in Babylonian mathematics a thousand years before Pythagoras.[19] Among German philologists only Franz Dornseiff took a close look at eastern culture from Israel to Anatolia, but in doing this he had the air of an outsider.

Dornseiff was one of the first to give credit to the new dimen-

sion of the impact of the Near East on classical Greece, which was discovered with the decipherment of Hittite mythological texts.[20] However, the first announcements and studies of "Illuyankas and Typhon" met with only a slight response. The breakthrough came with the text of *Kingship in Heaven*, published in 1946, the myth which has the castration of the god of heaven by Kumarbi, so similar to Hesiod's tale about Uranos and Kronos; since then the Kumarbi-Kronos parallel has been established and, largely as a result of the efforts of Albin Lesky, *Kumarbi* has become a standard reference text for classical philologists.[21] An important factor of acceptance, brought out by sympathetic Indo-Europeanists, was that with the Hittites an "Indo-European" people had emerged to represent the "Orient." But in the wake of Hittite epic and mythology similar texts of Semitic Ugarit came to the attention of classical scholars,[22] and the Greek fragments of Philon of Byblos dealing with Phoenician mythology attracted fresh interest.[23] In addition to mythological motifs the narrative techniques and the literary style of epic became the subject of comparative study, too. Since then, Homeric epic can no longer be held to have existed in a vacuum; it stands out against a background of comparable eastern literary forms.

However, a new line of defense quickly developed. It is generally and freely accepted that in the Bronze Age there were close contacts between Anatolia, the Semitic East, Egypt, and the Mycenaean world, that some "Aegean *koine*" can be found to characterize the thirteenth century B.C.[24] One can refer to Mycenaean imports in Ugarit; Alasia-Cyprus is mentioned as a nexus of East-West connections; Hesiod and Homer are also viewed from this perspective. What is much less in focus is the "orientalizing period" of the century between approximately 750 and 650 B.C.—that is, the Homeric epoch, when, as well as eastern skills and images, the Semitic art of writing was transmitted to Greece and made the recording of Greek literature possible for the first time. German scholars in particular had a strange tendency to lean toward an earlier dating of the Greek script,[25] thereby shielding Homeric Greece from the influence of

the East which was so notable in material culture around 700. It should be clear anyhow that both possibilities, Bronze Age and later adoptions, are not mutually exclusive; the impossibility of always making clear-cut distinctions cannot be used to refute the hypothesis of borrowing in both areas to an equal degree.

In the meantime, archaeological research has rendered the "dark ages" increasingly legible and has cast the eighth century in particular in ever-sharper relief. What proved decisive were the discoveries of Greek settlements in Syria and on Ischia in connection with the excavations at Lefkandi and Eretria on Euboea. The Assyrian expansion to the Mediterranean together with the spread of trade in metal ores in the whole area provides a persuasive historical framework for the movement of eastern craftsmen to the West, as well as for the spread of the Phoenician-Greek alphabet.[26] We now seem within reach of a balanced picture of that decisive epoch in which, under the influence of the Semitic East, Greek culture began its unique flowering, soon to assume cultural hegemony in the Mediterranean.[27]

This volume pursues the hypothesis that, in the orientalizing period, the Greeks did not merely receive a few manual skills and fetishes along with new crafts and images from the Luwian-Aramaic-Phoenician sphere, but were influenced in their religion and literature by the eastern models to a significant degree.[28] It will be argued that migrating "craftsmen of the sacred," itinerant seers and priests of purification, transmitted not only their divinatory and purificatory skills but also elements of mythological "wisdom." Indeed Homer, in an often-quoted passage of the *Odyssey*, enumerates various kinds of migrant craftsmen "who are public workers": first, "a seer or a healer," only then the carpenter, and, in addition, the "godly singer."[29] While the second chapter tries to follow the tracks of "seers" and "healers," the third chapter turns to the realm of these singers, presenting correspondences between eastern and Greek literature which make it probable to assume connections, even direct literary influence of high eastern civilizations on the

final phase of Homeric epic, that is, the beginning of Greek literacy, when writing took over from oral tradition.

The results which can be reached with any degree of certainty remain limited. The bridge that once provided the direct contact, the literary culture of ancient Syria, has irrevocably disappeared. On the other hand we have the unique opportunity to compare contemporaneous texts from both the Greek and the oriental sides. This task both enables and demands precision. By contrast, in the case of the more sensational connections between Kumarbi or Illuyankas and Hesiod a time gap of five or six centuries has to be bridged, in addition to the geographic distance between East and West. The Hesiodic problems, which have been the subject of much scholarly attention in recent decades, will not be discussed in detail here.[30] They complement the perspectives under consideration, especially in view of the clear link between Hesiod and Euboea.

The studies presented in this book may still run up against a final and perhaps insuperable line of defense, the tendency of modern cultural theories to approach culture as a system evolving through its own processes of internal economic and social dynamics, which reduces all outward influences to negligible parameters. There is no denying the intellectual acumen and achievement of such theories. But they may still represent just one side of the coin. It is equally valid to see culture as a complex of communication with continuing opportunities for learning afresh, with conventional yet penetrable frontiers, in a world open to change and expansion. The impact of written as opposed to oral culture is perhaps the most dramatic example of transformation wrought from the outside, through borrowing. It may still be true that the mere fact of borrowing should only provide a starting point for closer interpretation, that the form of selection and adaptation, of reworking and refitting to a new system is revealing and interesting in each case. But the "creative transformation" by the Greeks,[31] however important, should not obscure the sheer fact of borrowing; this would amount to yet another strategy of immunization designed to cloud what is foreign and disquieting.

The modest aim of this book is to serve as a messenger across boundaries,[32] to direct the attention of classicists to areas to which they have paid too little regard, and to make these fields of study more accessible even to nonspecialists. It may also encourage orientalists, hardly less prone to isolation, to keep or renew their contacts with neighboring fields.[33] My emphasis is deliberately on providing evidence for correspondences and for the likelihood of borrowings. If in certain cases the materials themselves do not provide incontrovertible evidence of cultural transfer, the establishment of similarities will still be of value, as it serves to free both the Greek and the oriental phenomena from their isolation and to create an arena of possible comparisons.

This is not to preclude more subtle interpretations of Greek achievements as a consequence. Yet in the period at about the middle of the eighth century, when direct contact had been established between the Assyrians and the Greeks, Greek culture must have been much less self-conscious and therefore much more malleable and open to foreign influence than it became in subsequent generations. It is the formative epoch of Greek civilization that experienced the orientalizing revolution.

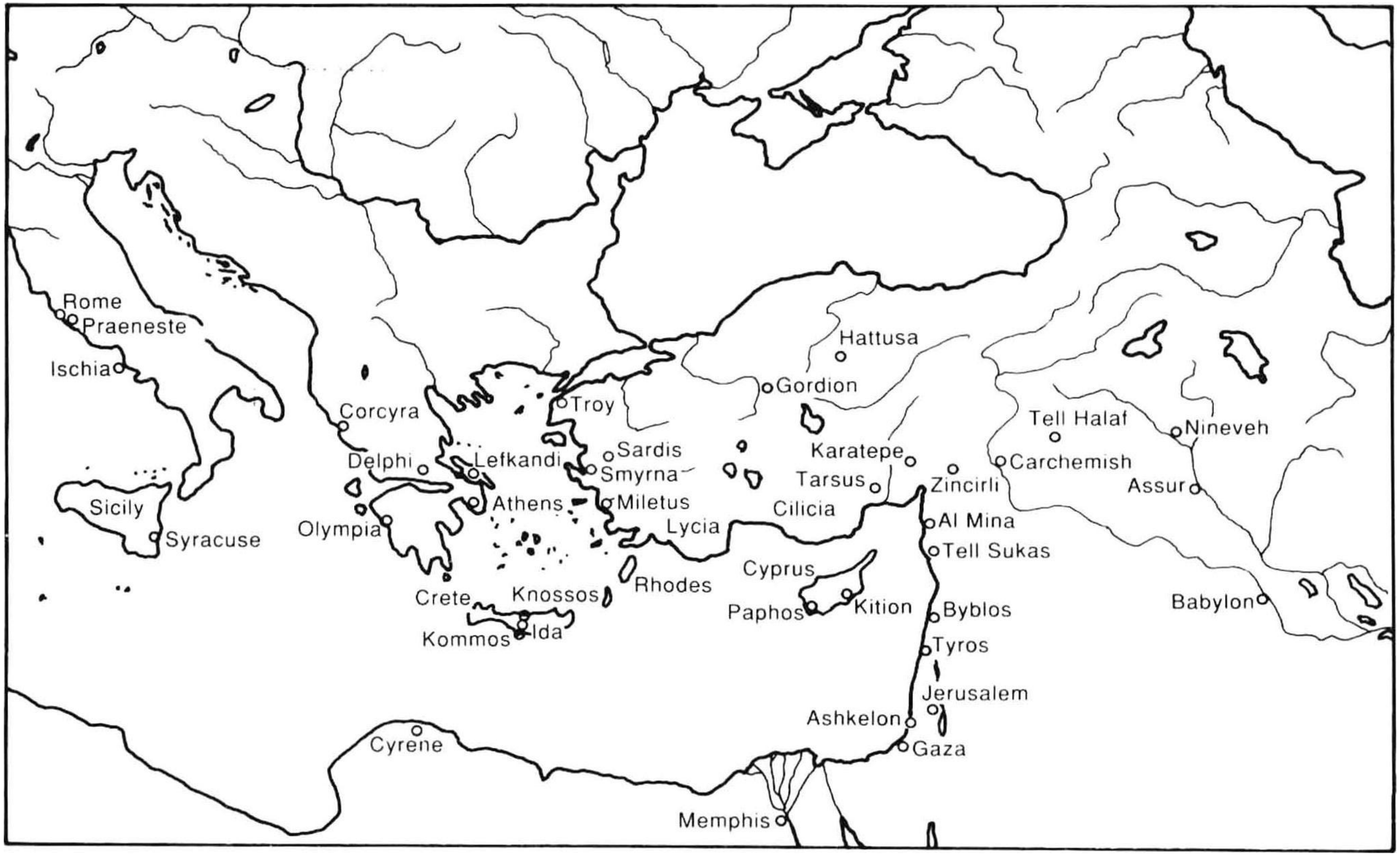
CHAPTER ONE

"WHO ARE PUBLIC WORKERS"

The Migrant Craftsmen

Historical Background

After the upheaval and devastation which prevailed from Greece through Anatolia to Syria and Palestine about 1200 B.C. and which is generally attributed, on the basis of Egyptian texts, to "peoples of the sea"—among whom the Philistines are the most tangible—the kingdoms, palaces, artistic skills, and writing systems which had made the glory of the Bronze Age had largely disappeared.[1] In the eastern Mediterranean, outside Egypt, urban civilization and literacy survived only in the area of Cilicia-Syria-Palestine. A strong tradition of Hittite civilization continued to dominate Cilicia and extended as far as northern Syria. Hittite style is most distinctive in monumental sculpture and other art objects—important sites are Tell Halaf-Guzana, Carchemish, Malatya-Milid, Sam'al-Zincirli, Karatepe[2]—and particularly in the Hittite hieroglyphic script, which persisted at Karatepe until nearly the end of the eighth century; it was used for a language of the Hittite family which is now called Hieroglyphic Luwian. Conquering Aramaic tribes, speaking a Semitic language and using alphabetic writing, won supremacy in some places, founding princedoms such as Guzana and Sam'al. Southern Syria, including the cities of Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre, had long been affected by Egyptian style and influences. The



The Mediterranean and the Near East in the early archaic period.

western Semites based in this area, called *Phoinikes* by the Greeks, were continuing to expand their sea trade. Early connections reached not only to Cyprus but also to Crete.[3] Increasingly important in these activities was the search for copper and iron ores.[4]

The most portentous achievement in Syria-Palestine was the development of the alphabetic script, which, through its ingenious simplification, made reading and writing more widely accessible for the first time. It was used equally by Hebrews, Phoenicians, and Aramaeans.[5] The invention goes back to the Bronze Age, but it gained its unique position only with the collapse of the Bronze Age, which made most of the other writing systems disappear.

The expansion of Assyria into this heterogeneous assemblage of cities, kingdoms, and tribal centers from the ninth century onwards brought dynamic change of world-historical proportions. For the Assyrians, too, the search for raw materials, particularly metals, seems to have been a driving force. In any event Assur built up the strongest army of the time, employed it in increasingly far-reaching raids with ruthless demands for submission and tribute, and thus founded the first world power. Ashurnaṣirpal (884–858) and Shalmaneser III (858–824) led the first successful advances to Syria; in 877 an Assyrian army stood on the shores of the Mediterranean for the first time. In 841 Tyre and Sidon were forced to pay tribute, and in 834 so was Tarsos in Cilicia. The Hittite city-states were forced to follow suit or were destroyed. The Greeks must have been aware of this eastern power, at least on Cyprus, because it was around this time—about 850—that Phoenicians from Tyre were settling on Cyprus; Kition became a Phoenician city.[6] Phoenician colonization was also reaching beyond to the far West: 814 is the traditional date for the founding of Carthage.

After Shalmaneser, Assyrian forces did not appear on the Mediterranean for a while. During this period Greek traders first reached Syria. Greek merchants are present in Al Mina on the Orontes estuary from the end of the ninth century;[7] from there the connections reach to North Syria, to Urartu, and