

## PART II THE GRECO-ROMAN AND JUDEO-CHRISTIAN ROOTS

### Chapter 3 Early Greece

1. The civilization of ancient Greece, from about the eighth to the first century B.C., and that of Rome, from the first century B.C. to the fifth century A.D., are referred to as *Greco-Roman* or *classical*.
2. While different in many respects, these two civilizations shared common ways of thinking and creating that were different from other ancient civilizations and that influenced the development of the Western humanistic tradition.
3. The word classical to describe the Greco-Roman tradition was first used in the Renaissance to denote “first class” or “best.”

#### I. Hellenism: The Rise of Greek Culture

1. In the context of world history, Greek civilization was a late comer.
2. The Greeks were influenced by the civilizations that preceded them but they were the first to express themselves in a way that was characteristically Western.
3. It was the first culture that can be called humanistic, glorifying human beings as individuals rather than as part of some larger social order.
4. Greek culture changed rapidly and was short lived.
5. The celebrated dynamism of Greek culture is met with somewhat greater ambivalence in modern times as the West has gained an appreciation of older civilizations and traditions.

#### B. Crete

1. The first Greek civilization developed on the Mediterranean island of Crete around 2000 B.C.
2. The island’s geographic location, equidistant between Egypt and the Greek mainland, was a primary factor in its role as a conduit of cultural transmission from Egypt to Greece.
3. Crete had a matriarchal form of government.
4. Natural forms (plants, animals, fish, etc.) were popular subjects for Cretan artists.
5. Cretan palaces were unfortified, sprawling, and elaborate.
6. Artifacts suggest a preference for pleasure and satisfaction over ritual and military discipline.

#### C. Mycenae and the Trojan War

1. In 1400 B.C. Crete was conquered by the Mycenae from the Greek mainland.
2. Wandering tribes from Europe settled in Greece and founded the city of Mycenae, which flourished between 1600 and 1200 B.C.
3. The civilization is sometimes called the Achaean from the name of its principal tribe.
4. The most famous king of the Mycenaean or Achaean civilization was Menelaus.

5. Menelaus and other Achaeans are immortalized in the classic tales of ancient Greek literature the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.
6. Historians believe the Trojan War was a real historical event, although its causes and other details are different from Homeric legend.

#### D. Mycenaean Art

1. Artifacts from Mycenae reveal a warlike patriarchal society in contrast to the Cretan civilization that preceded it.
2. It is sometimes called the “heroic age” because of the legends surrounding it.
3. Mycenae succumbed to uncivilized invaders from the North, the Dorians.
4. The subsequent four hundred years are referred to as the “dark ages” of Greece.

#### E. The Archaic Period

1. The Archaic (meaning nascent) epoch of Greek culture (700 to 480 B.C.) was the starting point of several aspects of Greek culture.
2. It marked the beginning of the city-state or *polis*.
3. Democracy or “rule by the people” was begun.
4. Classical Greek drama, religion, and poetry also took shape during this period.

### II. Greek Religion and Mythology

1. The Greeks did not create a great or lasting theology or body of mystical literature.
2. The stories of the gods of Mt. Olympus gave rise to no enduring religion.
3. Yet stories of the Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses remain, embodying deep intuitive understandings of human psychology.
4. The Romans assimilated Greek gods and religion.
5. The gods of the ancient Greeks could and often did involve themselves in human affairs.
6. Above the gods was a belief in the fate or destiny of individual human beings, which the gods could predict but did not have the power to alter in any fundamental way.

### III. Homer and the Epic

1. The poet Homer (800 B.C) is revered as the first writer of Western literature.
2. Yet his works were not written, he was part of a Greek oral tradition that preceded written literature.
3. Homer’s two great epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, have been translated for generations and are still widely read today.
4. The original purpose of epic poetry was to sing the great deeds of men.
5. Though the epic hero can have human flaws, he must be almost superhuman in courage, strength, and greatness of character.
6. Both of Homer’s epics concern themselves with the Trojan War.

#### A. The *Iliad*

1. The *Iliad* is not the story of the Trojan War; it is the story of an event in the life of Achilles.
2. The poem was written in Greek hexameter (six beats to a measure).
3. The poem exhibits extraordinary attention to realistic detail.
4. Three aspects of reality—the internal, the external, and the universal—are in interplay throughout the work.

B. The *Odyssey*

1. The *Odyssey* tells of the journey home of Odysseus after the Trojan War.
2. The return trip takes ten years.
3. The *Odyssey* has a fairy tale romantic quality not found in the *Iliad*.
4. The work also suggests an African or Asian influence.
5. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* may or may not have been the work of a single poet.

IV. The Lyric

1. The trend toward individual expression, so characteristic of modern poetry, began with the development of the *lyric* about two centuries after Homer.
2. Lyric poetry, even when not set to music, usually has a musical effect.
3. Lyric originally meant “accompanied by the lyre.”
4. The lyric spirit seems to challenge the heroic warlike ethos of earlier times.
5. The development of lyric poetry can be traced to the coast of Asia Minor and the islands of the Aegean, notably Lesbos.

V. The Archaic Period: Architecture and Sculpture

1. Greek architecture had humble beginnings.
2. Archaic temples have a solemn weightiness.
3. As in Mesopotamia and Egyptian temples, a room was created in the Greek temple for the statue of a god to be separated from the public.
4. The Kouros of Sounion, a standing male nude, was made in the archaic period in about 600 B.C.
5. The Kouros of Sounion appears rigid and posed but such figures do exhibit some attempt to appear natural.