PART I

SCRIPT, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

CHAPTER I

DISCOVERY AND DECIPHERMENT

1. THE HOMERIC AGE AS MYTH

THE Hellenes of the classical period preserved no clear memory either of a system of writing earlier than the Greek alphabet, or of a time when they and their language were not firmly rooted on the Greek mainland.

The source of the alphabet is clearly acknowledged by Herodotus (v, 58–9, in Rawlinson's translation):

> Now the Phoenicians who came with Cadmus, and to whom the Gephyraei belonged, introduced into Greece upon their arrival a great variety of arts, among the rest that of writing, whereof the Greeks till then had, as I think, been ignorant. And originally they shaped their letters exactly like all the other Phoenicians, but afterwards, in course of time, they changed by degrees their language, and together with it the form likewise of their characters. Now the Greeks who dwelt about those parts at that time were chiefly the Ionians. The Phoenician letters were accordingly adopted by them, but with some variation in the shape of a few, and so they arrived at the present use, still calling the letters Phoenician, as justice required, after the name of those who were the first to introduce them into Greece. Paper rolls also were called from old διφθέραι by the Ionians, because formerly when paper was scarce they used, instead, the skins of sheep and goats—on which many of the barbarians are even now wont to write. I myself saw Cadmeian characters engraved upon some tripods in the temple of Apollo Ismenias in Boeotian Thebes, most of them shaped like the Ionian. One of the tripods has the inscription following:
>
> *Me did Amphitryon place, from the far Teleboans coming.*
>
> This would be about the age of Laius, the son of Labdacus, the son of Polydorus, the son of Cadmus.

The ease with which Herodotus was able to read this and two other inscriptions in the same temple, allegedly written some four generations or so before the Trojan war, may have left him with some suspicion that their great antiquity was only a pious fraud; and a more general feeling that writing was wholly out of place in the heroic age is reflected in Homer, whose only reference to a visual message is couched in such vague terms as to leave doubt whether true writing is intended at all (*Il.* VI, 155–70):

> Now Glaukos was the father of blameless Bellerophon, whom the gods had endowed with beauty and manly grace, but whom Proitos, his overlord, expelled from Argos in

murderous anger. Proitos' wife Anteia had conceived a passionate desire to go to bed with him secretly, but was unable to prevail on the prudent and high-minded Bellerophon. So she went with a lying story to King Proitos: 'May death be yours if you do not kill Bellerophon: he has tried to rape me.' The king was seized with fury when he heard this; taboo restrained him from killing him on the spot, but he dispatched him to Lycia with a folded board, scratched with many malevolent symbols designed to bring him ruin: he had only to show them to the king's father-in-law for his doom to be sealed.

But although Agamemnon, Odysseus and Nestor might have been illiterate, and although their ancient palaces and cities had long since crumbled into dust, it was in ancient times accepted without question that the Homeric heroes had been Greeks in language, religion and every other distinguishing feature, and that among their subjects were to be numbered the ancestors of most, if not all, of the classical population. Homer possessed no term which could be used without anachronism to refer to this linguistic unity (though the Carians are called βαρβαρόφωνοι in *Il.* II, 867); but for Herodotus the Trojan war was a clear-cut struggle between Ἕλληνες and Asiatics, and a direct antecedent of the rivalry which was to culminate in the Persian invasions (I, 3–5).

Both Homer and Herodotus agreed, however, that among the segmented and constantly-shifting population of the early Aegean there had also been elements which did not speak Greek. This is clear from the description of Crete in *Od.* XIX, 172–7: 'There is a land called Crete, in the middle of the wine-dark sea, beautiful and rich, with water on all sides; on her are innumerable men and ninety cities, and one language jostles another: there are Achaeans, and great-hearted True-Cretans, Cydonians, Dorians divided into their three tribes(?), and excellent Pelasgians.'

In a significant passage (I, 57–8) evidently based on personal investigation, Herodotus concludes from the speech of the 'Pelasgians' living in his time on the Hellespont, on Lemnos and in the problematical city of 'Creston' (who in earlier times had inhabited Thessaliotis and Attica, where they had built the wall round the Acropolis) that this widespread people had spoken a barbarous tongue. In order to reconcile Pelasgian and Athenian claims to autochthony, he argues that the Athenians must have been Pelasgians who at some time adopted the Greek language; and goes on, with a disregard for his own previous argument and for our own more careful discrimination between 'race' and 'language', to describe the Hellenic race as one which had never changed its language, but had been 'severed' (ἀποσχισθέν) from the Pelasgians and had increased its numbers at their expense. The same ambiguities are

present in his description of the Ionians (VII, 94): 'When they dwelt in the Peloponnese and inhabited the land now called Achaea (which was before the arrival of Danaus and Xuthus in the Peloponnese) they were called, according to the Greek account, "Pelasgians of the sea-shore", but afterwards, from Ion the son of Xuthus, they were called Ionians.' Both Sophocles (in his *Inachus*) and Thucydides (IV, 109, 4) use 'Tyrrhenian' as a synonym for 'Pelasgian', in allusion to the widespread belief in a Pelasgian migration from Thessaly and the North Aegean to Italy, associated or identical with the Etruscan migration derived from Lydia by Herodotus. This theory, found in Hellanicus of Lesbos (fifth century B.C.), Andron of Halicarnassus, Varro, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo and others, has been subjected to detailed but inconclusive criticism both by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in antiquity (Ῥωμ. Ἀρχ. I, xxv–xxx) and recently by Pallottino (1947). A germ of historical truth is indicated by the discovery at Kaminia on Lemnos in 1885 of a sixth-century stele inscribed in what is almost certainly a language closely related to Etruscan.

The classical picture of a Greece inhabited since the birth of mankind by a number of Greek-speaking tribes, living side-by-side with Pelasgians, Eteocretans, Leleges and other obscure peoples, was to be undermined by the Jewish-Christian cosmogony which, while retaining a finite date for the Creation, dismissed the possibility of local autochthony in favour of a diffusion of all languages and peoples from a common centre in Asia. A long period of unprofitable speculation on the mutual relationship of languages, in which Hebrew played a pernicious role, continued until 1796, when Sir William Jones gave first public expression to the view that Sanskrit, Latin and Greek had 'sprung from some common source, which perhaps no longer exists'.

In the next twenty years Franz Bopp and Rasmus Rask were able to show conclusively that the Greek language, like its relatives, was in fact the result of a continuous evolution from a common 'Indo-European' ancestor, and that it must therefore at one time have been brought into Greece from some more central location somewhere on the great plains which stretch from Poland to Turkestan. The age in which the hypothetical parent language had begun to differentiate into separate dialects, and the date at which the first Greek-speakers had entered the Balkan peninsula, could not however be determined by any existing historical evidence; and the obvious unhistoricity of the greater part of Greek legend made any classical testimony to the language situation before the eighth century B.C. appear entirely untrustworthy.

The same uncertainties veiled the process by which the classical Greek dialects, whose study was stimulated by progress in linguistic theory and in the search for inscriptions, had reached their geographical distribution. It was

clear that a large and definite movement of population was necessary to explain the occupation of the Peloponnese by the Dorian-speakers, keeping in subjection a helot class, and cutting off the Arcadians entirely from the sea-coasts from which their nearest relatives the Cypriots had evidently emigrated. But it would have been rash to accept as historical fact Thucydides' account of the 'Return of the Herakleidai' (I, 12), or Eratosthenes' precise dating of it to 1104 B.C., eighty years after the fall of Troy.

2. MYCENAE AND KNOSSOS: THE PIONEERS

In the brilliantly perceptive first twelve paragraphs of his history Thucydides sketched the early development of Hellas, from a conglomeration of migrating tribes without cities, commerce or security of communication, down to the rallying of the Greek forces under Agamemnon for the Trojan war.

> Mycenae was certainly a small place, and many of the towns of that period do not seem to us today to be particularly imposing; yet that is not good evidence for rejecting what the poets and the general tradition have to say about the size of the expedition. Suppose, for example, that the city of Sparta were to become deserted, and that only the temples and foundations of buildings remained, I think that future generations would, as time passed, find it very difficult to believe that the place had really been as powerful as it was represented to be. We have no right, therefore, to judge cities by their appearances rather than by their actual power, and there is no reason why we should not believe that the Trojan expedition was the greatest that had ever taken place.

But most nineteenth-century historians (particularly in Germany) were inclined to dismiss Troy and Mycenae as mere figments of poetic imagination; preferring to telescope Thucydides' narrative, by the omission of the Heroic Age, to read as if the development of the classical city-states had been the first interruption of that primitive state of barbarism that he so vividly described.

The first proof that a golden age of Mycenae had really existed was due to the vision and persistence of one man, Heinrich Schliemann. Born in 1822, the son of a poor North German pastor, he was fascinated in boyhood by the story of Troy (which in daydreams he already saw himself excavating) and enthralled by the cadences of Homer's Greek, first heard on the lips of a drunken miller. At the age of forty-six, having amassed a fortune in Russia and having learnt fifteen languages, he retired from business, married a sixteen-year-old Greek girl and devoted himself to archaeology—for which, even in those early days of the science, he began with few technical qualifications apart from great enthusiasm and a common-sense appreciation of stratification. After three seasons at Troy, where the ancient settlement was triumphantly laid

bare, he began in August 1876 to excavate the citadel of Mycenae, whose great Gate of the Lions had ever since prehistoric times been clearly visible above ground.

Rich hoards of gold, massive architecture and sophisticated art forms soon proved that the 'Mycenaeans' had reached a level of civilization which was indeed far removed from primitive barbarism, and which fully justified Homer's reminiscence of it. The chronology of his finds was not at first exactly appreciated, but the Mycenaean age appeared to be approximately contemporary with the Egyptian New Kingdom (*c.* 1580–1100 B.C.). Schliemann was equally vague about the race to which his 'Mycenaeans' had belonged. At the time of his excavations he was confident that he was indeed recovering the burials of Agamemnon and of the other Achaeans of his dynasty; but in a letter to Virchow nine years later (18 June 1885) he says:

> I have been at pains to demonstrate that Tiryns and Mycenae must necessarily have been built and inhabited by the *Phoenicians*, who in a remote prehistoric age flooded Greece and the islands of the Ionian and Aegean seas with colonies, and who were only finally expelled, around 1100 B.C., by the so-called Dorian Invasion.

This view, perhaps pressed on Schliemann by the 'experts', was still being held by Dörpfeld in 1936. Reconsidering Schliemann's discoveries, Tsountas (1897) insisted that, although the Mycenaeans were illiterate (since no sign of indigenous writing had apparently been found on the Mainland), they were nevertheless Greeks; so too did Leaf in his introduction to Schuchhardt's *Schliemann* (1891):

> Now we should rather suppose that the original dialect (of the Homeric poems) was that of the ancestors of these Asiatic Aeolians, the Achaians of the eleventh century. What the form of their speech was we cannot now pretend to say. It must have differed greatly from Fick's 'Aeolic'; it was the common parent of Thessalian, Arcadian and Cyprian, in all of which we see various points of connexion with the Epic language. These affinities do not allow of an even approximate reconstruction of the parent speech; but they do allow us to assume that there was once a *common Achaian language* spoken by the dwellers in Mycenae and Tiryns, and over the greater part of the Greek mainland.

In a letter (1 January 1889) written two years before his death, Schliemann confided that 'I would like to end my life's labours with one great work—the prehistoric palace of the kings of Knossos in Crete'. Since its description by Buondelmonti in the fifteenth century, this ancient site had been known to lie at the village of Makrotikho or Makritikhos, six kilometres south of Candia (now Iraklion) in a sheltered valley leading into the interior, and out of sight

of the sea. In 1877 the Spanish consul Minos Kalokairinos, a native of Candia, had made a small dig on the top of the Κεφάλα Τσελεμπῆ, 'Squire's Knoll', during which he had uncovered some of the magazines with their large *pithoi* and had recovered an inscribed tablet, now Ga34 (Evans later found others in Kalokairinos' spoil-heaps); one of the *pithoi* then found is in the National Museum at Athens. Three years later the American W. J. Stillman, who had noticed the double axe signs on the masonry, applied in the name of the newly-founded Archaeological Institute of America to the Imperial Ottoman Government for a *firman* to excavate at Knossos. He was allowed to anticipate the arrival of permission and began to dig; but the *firman* never materialized and he was forced to stop. Schliemann in 1886 confirmed the 'Mycenaean' character of the remains; in 1889 he tried to buy the knoll from its multiple owners, but found their price too high for a site which 'I had satisfied myself I would easily be able to excavate in a week with a hundred workmen'. In addition to the rapacity of the proprietors Schliemann met with the usual obstruction from the Ottoman authorities, as always highly suspicious of archaeologists whom they suspected of subversive designs, and discouragement from the native Syllogos that administered the Candia Museum, who were afraid of what might happen to any treasures unearthed in the prevailing state of political unrest. His plan to excavate Knossos was postponed in favour of another season at Troy and cut short by his death: for this narrow escape Evans was lastingly thankful.

In 1886 Evans, then keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, was presented by Greville Chester with a seal-stone from Crete of a type recently publicized by Milchhoefer, engraved with unfamiliar 'hieroglyphs'. His intuition that Crete held the clue not only to a widespread system of writing among the 'Mycenaeans', but also to the origins of their civilization, brought Evans to Athens in 1893. He was there able to buy further specimens of Cretan seal-stones, and also to show that among the Mycenae finds there were in fact two vessels bearing writing. His travels to Crete in the following spring brought sufficient new evidence of writing (largely in the form of seal-stones similar to that shown in fig. 1, worn as γαλόπετρες or milk-charms by the women of the villages) to decide him to buy a part share of the Kephala site, thereby forestalling Joubin of the French School; and to publish his preliminary conclusions (1894). He argued that the 'Mycenaeans' must, in view of their advanced civilization, have been literate; and distinguished two phases, an earlier 'pictographic' script and a later linear or 'quasi-alphabetic'.

There is the strongest presumption for believing that in Crete at least the race among whom the earlier Aegean characters were originally rife was of non-Hellenic stock.

But if, at any rate towards the close of the Mycenaean period, there was already a Greek population in Crete, it becomes probable that the mysterious characters with which we are dealing may also have been used by men of Greek speech.

Further travels through Crete in 1895 and 1896, partly in company with the young Myres, gave material for a further article (1897) which included the inscribed libation table from Psykhro (Linear A). In November 1899 the Turks finally evacuated Crete; at the New Year Evans was able to buy the whole Kephala site; and permission was given for a Knossos excavation, under the auspices of the British School, to be partly financed by the new Cretan Exploration Fund.

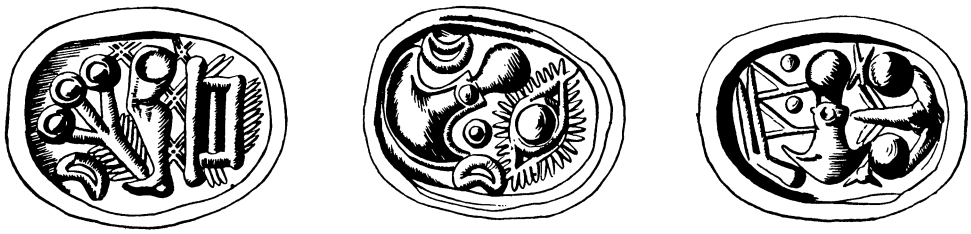

Fig. 1. Three-sided cornelian seal-stone from eastern Crete (P. 49* in Evans, *Scripta Minoa I*, p. 159).

The first of six seasons, in which Evans was assisted by Mackenzie with Fyfe as architect, began on 23 March 1900. Within a week the first of a very large number of inscribed tablets (Linear B) were found: some of these depicted vessels similar to those illustrated among foreign offerings in an Egyptian tomb of the reign of Queen Hatshepsut (1516–1481 B.C.), which gave an approximate indication of their date. Later evidence showed that the tablets had been written just before the final destruction of the palace, which further Egyptian parallels proved to have occurred early in the reign of Amenhotep III (1414–1378 B.C.).

Evans also found, under a staircase adjoining the magazines, a deposit of clay documents inscribed with 'hieroglyphs' and bearing the impressions of seal-stones of the γαλόπετρα type. In the excavation report for 1900 he recorded the 'hieroglyphic' and linear tablets as being contemporary; explaining the first as the product of the native Eteocretans who had been responsible for the 'Kamares' pottery of the earlier period, the second as evidence of 'the intrusion of a new element' which had brought with it the Mycenaean civilization from the Mainland.

In the 1902 report the sequence *Kamares—Palace Style* was amended to *Middle Minoan—Proto-Mycenaean—Mycenaean*, with an indiscriminate use of the terms 'Mycenaean' and 'Minoan' as a general label for the palace and its

treasures. From 1903 onwards the term 'Mycenaean' was dropped by Evans, to be replaced in due course by the now canonical division into the nine periods from *Early Minoan* I to *Late Minoan* III. The civilization of Crete had proved to be both more ancient and more autonomous than had been realized when the earlier terminology was evolved, as he emphasized in his presidential address to the Hellenic Society (1912):

> When we come to regard the Minoan remains themselves as stratified by the various catastrophes, it becomes evident that they are the results of a gradual evolution. There is no break. The unity of the whole civilization is such as almost to impose the conclusion that there was a continuity of race. If the inhabitants of the latest Palace structures are to be regarded as 'Achaeans', the Greek occupation of Crete must, on this showing, be carried back to Neolithic times—a very improbable conclusion.

How Evans' Knossocentric view had come to affect his perspective on the Mycenaean civilization itself is shown a page later, where he describes it as no more than 'a Minoan plantation' and as 'a Mainland branch of the Minoan culture':

> We must clearly recognize that down to at least the twelfth century B.C. the dominant factor both in Mainland Greece and in the Aegean world was still non-Hellenic, and must still unquestionably be identified with one or other branch of the old Minoan race. But this is far from saying that even at the time of the first Minoan conquerors in the Peloponnese, or approximately speaking the sixteenth century B.C., they may not have found settlers of Hellenic stock already in the land.

Simultaneously with Evans' discoveries at Knossos, tablets in a somewhat different script (Linear A) were found at Agia Triada in the south of Crete by Halbherr (not published till 1945) and also in smaller numbers at other Cretan sites. In 1908 Pernier found the unique Phaistos disk, stamped in clay from movable pictographic 'type': its Cretan origin is still disputed. Keramopoullos in 1921 discovered twenty-eight stirrup-jars in a storeroom of the Mycenaean palace at Thebes, lettered in a script which proved to be identical with the Linear B of Knossos: these greatly extended the evidence for the character of Mainland writing, previously confined to a few uncertain inscriptions with variable forms on pots from Mycenae, Tiryns, Eleusis and Orchomenos.

3. THE YEARS OF STAGNATION

Evans' *Scripta Minoa I* (1909) contained his collection of inscribed seal-stones, the hieroglyphic and Linear A material from Knossos, and fourteen of the Linear B tablets (five had already appeared in the 1900 dig report). No further