

Lecture I

THE POET'S CIRCUMSTANCES

A. HESIOD AND HOMER

AMONG the facts of early Greek history the rise of the Greek Epic, and in particular of the *Iliad*, has a place of evident importance. But to the historian's question 'how exactly did it happen?' no quite confident answer has yet been given. We can speak with reasonable confidence about the rise of Greek sculpture, painting, architecture, and of other techniques, peaceful and warlike: much of our understanding of an exceptionally creative phase of human history depends on such knowledge. The technique of literature is historically no less important. Here too we can speak with reasonable confidence from the seventh century onwards, from Archilochos;¹—in spite of the fact that of Archilochos and his successors for a hundred and fifty years we have little but the most casual fragments. Why then do we feel so relatively helpless in face of the poems, which have survived whole, of Hesiod and Homer?

There are reasons for this, some accidental, some intrinsic. It is relatively accidental, in Hesiod's case, that his contemporary Amphidamas of Chalkis, whom he names, is a less famous person and therefore less datable than for example Gyges of Lydia (whom Archilochos names). But, to my thinking at least, Hesiod's place in history is not too hard a problem: he lived about 700 B.C., a generation or so before Archilochos: intensely concerned with his own experiences, he is the man who made literature personal. Both of his two great poems are 'occasional', circumstantiated: they rose out of occasions in his private life, a vision on Helikon, a quarrel with his brother. As a social phenomenon his importance is, I believe, cardinal.² In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* the problem is more intrinsically difficult because they belong to no personal occasions; they tell of a distant past and are themselves timeless.

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This has led during the past century to that enormous variety of hypothesis which makes the Homeric Question notorious. I do not suppose the end is really in sight: the signs which I seem to detect of a growing *communis opinio* are no doubt due to my selecting what I like.³ However that may be, in these lectures I must make some very large assumptions. I assume that Homer wrote the *Iliad*, substantially as we have it, in the eighth century B.C. I shall not be much concerned with the *Odyssey*, but for clearness let me say that I believe it to be, in its present form at least, substantially later (later than Hesiod, whereas the *Iliad* is earlier), and the work of a different poet.⁴ It would be hard for me at any time, and happily uncalled for in lectures like these, to attempt to sift other hypotheses critically, or to establish this one by orderly argument. I will not try to demonstrate my chosen hypothesis, but to illustrate it, to explore it in certain directions: the method may perhaps be called (so far as it succeeds) a *reductio ad non absurdum*.

B. THE PANIONIA

We are inquiring into the poet's historical circumstances: we may begin with looking at a few of his similes. In his similes Homer speaks of the real world round him. When Achilles shouts from the trench, Homer likens it to the sound of the trumpet:

xviii 219 Like the loud music, when the trumpet calls
 220 Because the city is circled with the foe,
 Came the loud music of Achilles' call.

'The heroes do not know of the trumpet, the poet does' is the ancient comment on these lines: he is describing some sudden danger to a Greek city within his own experience; as when the Kolophonian exiles seized Smyrna, or troops from Chios captured Erythrai.⁵ It was a sound which both the poet and his audience knew well: an event of contemporary life which might occur anywhere. Others are more particular, are exactly localized: for example the birds flocking in the Kaystros valley close to Ephesos:⁶

ii 459 As flocks of flying birds in their many kinds,
 460 The geese, the cranes, the swans with their long necks,
 On the water meadows by Kaystros river,
 Fly round, rejoicing in their wings, or settle
 Noisily, and the ground is loud with them:

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So they in their many kinds from huts and ships
 465 Streamed on Skamandros plain; and earth was loud
 Beneath them, with the tramp of men and horses.

I would add here the lines from the *Odyssey* where Odysseus compares Nausikaa (for her straightness) to the palm-tree at Delos:

Od. vi 162 In *Delos* once, beside Apollo's altar
 I saw a palm which grew as straight as you.
 For I and all my host put in at Delos
 165 Upon that quest which was to ruin me.
 I marvelled at that tree, and gazed, as now,
 Long: I had never seen so straight a stem.

This is not from the *Iliad*: the *Odyssey* poet addresses a later audience, I think a seventh-century audience. More important, it is not a simile: it is the hero (not the poet) who claims to have seen the tree. Yet I cannot doubt that the hero's visit is a fiction and the tree is real. The poet speaks of a tree which his audience knew about. Many of them will have been to Delos, all will have heard of it; he can count on their smile of delighted recognition.

The great Meeting (the 'panegyris') of the Ionians at Delos is famous, and I shall return to it later. Thucydides says that in his time, until its renewal in the spring of 424, it had been for some while in abeyance: but 'it used to be what the *Ephesia* is now', a gathering of men, with wives and children, from the whole Ionian world.⁷ The *Kajstros* birds and the Delian palm tree suggest that in the eighth and seventh centuries these two great Meetings (*panegyreis*) coexisted: the panegyris of Artemis at Ephesos, and of Apollo at Delos. A third Meeting, in some ways more 'pan-Ionian' than either of the others, was the panegyris of Poseidon Helikonios at Mykale, and this too was (so I believe) known to Homer and his audience. When Achilles has re-entered the battle, the roar of a man whose windpipe he has pierced is likened to a bull led to sacrifice:

xx 403 He roared his life out, bellowing; like a bull
 Dragged, bellowing, to the *Helikonian* King:
 405 The young men drag him, and the God rejoices.

The worship of Poseidon Helikonios was widely spread in Ionia, but his most famous cult (in later times at least) was on Mount Mykale, opposite the island of Samos.⁸ The sanctuary was called the Pan-Ionian, its festival (its

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panegyris) the Panionia. It was regarded as Ionia's national centre. It was here that the Ionians assembled in the middle of the sixth century, when King Cyrus of Persia had destroyed the friendly power of Lydia and there was great need for union. It was again their centre when they concerted their revolt from King Dareios in the early fifth century.⁹ The lines about the Helikonian God indicate that this Panionion on Mount Mykale was known, already, to Homer. At least, so I believe, though it has been seriously doubted.

In two impressive papers read before the Berlin Academy in 1906, Wilamowitz was concerned to show that there was no Ionian people (such at least as we find later) till after the 'Meliac War', which he put at about 700 B.C.¹⁰ Till then, he believed, the cities later called Ionian were of very various national complexions—men from Krete, Thessaly, Peloponnese, and elsewhere; but about 700 these cities, for whatever reason, combined to destroy the city of Melia. Melia's territory, on the northern slopes of Mount Mykale, was (he believed) then divided among the conquerors: in this territory was a shrine of Poseidon Helikonios, which was maintained by the conquerors to be *thenceforth* a common central shrine and to be called the 'Pan-Ionian'; and thus (as Wilamowitz saw it) the Meliac War gave birth to the Ionian nation. Wilamowitz supposed that the lines in the *Iliad* were written before this war, and that therefore the Helikonian altar at Mykale had not yet become the altar of the Panionion: indeed, he denied that there was any reason to suppose the poet spoke of Mykale at all, since Poseidon Helikonios was worshipped in many cities of Asiatic Greece.¹¹

This argument, for the non-existence of an Ionian race (or of a Panionion) before c.700, is coherent and vigorous, and I have not yet mentioned Wilamowitz's crowning proof [King Hektor: see p. 6 below]; but it begs certain questions. Why should it have needed the Meliac War to give to the Ionian cities the sense of their nationhood? For my part I believe that the classical traditions of an 'Ionian Migration', sent out deliberately from Attica to Asia, are on the whole closer to the main facts than the traditions (known to Herodotos and amplified in later writers) of haphazard arrivals from Krete, Thessaly, Peloponnese, etc. Neither class of tradition has the whole truth but I think that Thucydides is right in regarding the main ex-

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pansion into Asia as an organized and not a tumultuary undertaking. Thucydides makes a distinction between the Dorian Invasion on the one hand (with its tumultuary repercussions) and on the other such non-tumultuary undertakings as the Athenian settlements in Asia and the Peloponnesian settlements in the west: between the tumultuary and the non-tumultuary movements he sets a long period of recovery.¹² The essential truth of this picture is becoming clear: the long interim is, roughly, the Protogeometric age, during which the 'Hellenic' civilization was in gestation. The only Greeks in or near Asia at this time were probably the Dorians in the south; in Rhodes and Kos and the Halikarnassos peninsula. It was probably when the Protogeometric style began to give way to the Geometric (perhaps about 900 B.C.) that the Hellenic Conquest of Ionia began.¹³ It is likely *a priori* that it should begin in the south, round Miletos and Mykale and Samos:¹⁴ and here (on the northern face of Mount Mykale) we find that altar of Poseidon Helikonios which remained for centuries the rallying point of the Ionian nation.¹⁵ I imagine that this altar is as old as the Hellenic conquest, and that its *central* quality was clear from the start: and I have no doubt that it is this of which Homer speaks.

All around this altar of Poseidon Helikonios we find Boeotian names.¹⁶ These make it virtually certain that the God was named from Mount Helikon in Boeotia: that is to say, that Boeotia had once been Ionian. It may be that at this time (about 900 B.C.) Boeotia, or some part of it, was still Ionian: it is perhaps more likely that these Ionians from Boeotia had already withdrawn into Attica. There was an altar of Poseidon Helikonios at Athens,¹⁷ and for my part, I should regard these two altars, one at Athens and one on Mount Mykale, as the start and finish of the 'great expedition'. If so, the altar at Mykale can be compared to Apollo's altar outside the gates of Naxos in Sicily: here the colonists first touched the promised land.¹⁸

I must return to this Migration (or Conquest) later. My immediate concern is that Homer's Ionia knew of this custom called *panegyris*—knew of the great *Meeting* at Mykale as well as at Ephesos and perhaps Delos. It is an audience such as a *panegyris* could provide (and not merely the guests at a rich man's table) which the *Iliad* demands. One more simile: Hera is returning from Ida to Olympos:

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- xv 80 And as a man's mind leaps, who far on earth
 Has travelled, and the fancy comes, he'd be
That place or *that*: and in desire he journeys:
 So swift and eager Hera flew, and reacht
 Olympos top, the concourse of the Gods.

A God moves 'as easily as thought' (ὥστε νόημα). Greek poets return to this notion constantly: the simile gives us no date, we cannot deduce from it what means of communication were known to the poet. The other way round: the little which we know about eighth-century communications must serve to define his picture. The poet has, himself, 'travelled far on earth': poets were travellers by profession. But communications were not quite easy: only a God could travel at will, mortal travellers could move only when occasion offered and for the rest must 'journey in desire'. There will have been convoys and caravans for a panegyris: but only the rich and leisured could go to many. The eighth-century victors at Olympia are very largely from western Peloponnese: the audiences at Ephesos, Mykale, Delos will have had their various regional complexions.¹⁹

C. HEKTOR OF CHIOS AND AGAMEMNON OF KYME

Wilamowitz's crowning proof that the Panionian festival came rather late in the history of Ionia (later than Homer's lines about the Helikonian God) is a passage from Ion of Chios. He rightly sets great value on Ion's words; the fact that we have only fragments from this man, who lived earlier than any extant historian, who knew Kimon and Sophokles personally, who was specially interested (as we are) in the island of Chios, is one of the grave iniquities of fortune. Ion wrote about the 'first foundation' of Chios, what I will call the *Hellenic Conquest*: he said that at first a mixed population ('Karians, Kretans, and Abantes') had the island, until Amphiklos arrived from north Euboea. Amphiklos is thus no doubt the first king of Greek Chios, the leader of the systematic Hellenic Conquest: and we should probably therefore put him about 900 B.C. or a little earlier: not much earlier.²⁰ [Heropythos' pedigree is against putting him much later: see below, pp. 8ff.]

His great-grandson, Ion continues, was King Hektor. Hektor drove the earlier inhabitants from the island, and in his reign Chios joined the Panionion, that is, the Pan-Ionian league which centred upon Mount Mykale.

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Hektor, the great-grandson, should be about a century later than Amphiklos: 800 B.C. or a little earlier or later.

The name catches the ear: King Hektor of Chios: like that other early king of Asiatic Greeks, King Agamemnon of Kyme whose daughter married Midas of Phrygia. That should be about 700 B.C.²¹ We owe King Agamemnon's name to Aristotle and probably to Ephoros, who was as much interested in Kyme as Ion was in Chios. I fancy that both kings are historical figures, and stand in some fairly immediate relation to the *Iliad*. I am inclined to think that the *Iliad* is later than King Hektor (of about 800 B.C.) and earlier than King Agamemnon (of about 700 B.C.), or, to put it bluntly, that Hektor in the poem *owes* his name to King Hektor of Chios, whereas Agamemnon in the poem *gave* his name to King Agamemnon of Kyme. That is to say, that the poem was written in the course of the eighth century and contained (in Hektor of Troy) a considerable amount of free fiction, of new fiction: and that the prestige which it conferred on Agamemnon induced the great Aeolic families to associate themselves with him and to trace their descent to him. (About a hundred years later again, about 600 B.C., we find the Aeolians still basing their claim to the Troad on their descent from the man who had been commander-in-chief.²²)

I should not care to found much on two names which catch the ear in this way. If the claim of the Aeolic families to be descended from Agamemnon was a consequence of Homer's writing of the *Iliad*, it was not a very important consequence. The view that Hektor of Troy is a poet's creation is, I believe, of great importance: but it has been advanced, and it must rest, on more serious grounds than the name of a king of Chios.²³ I need not concern myself further with the date of this King Agamemnon, but I should like to clear some ground about King Hektor.

As I see it, the Hellenic Conquest of Chios was about 900 B.C. The 'great expedition' (see note 18) went from Athens to Mykale, but the conquerors of Chios came (it is said) from north Euboia: a rather separate stream,²⁴ midway between the main Ionian and the main Aeolic movements. King Hektor, in the fourth generation, should be about 800. Homer, in the middle, or second half, of the eighth century, should belong to the fifth or sixth Hellenic generation. Chios, founded from north Euboia, had attached itself to the Pan-Ionian league probably before Homer was born.

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This means (I expect) that King Hektor's generation was illiterate. The great gulf which has seemed to almost all historians (ancient and modern alike—except Thucydides) to divide the colonizing of Ionia from that of Sicily, is surely due to the fact that they are separated by the invention of the alphabet. The conquerors of Ionia are wrapped in myth, they are sons of mythical heroes or of Gods. They belong to pre-literate Greece. King Hektor in the fourth generation lived, as I think, about 800. Whether the alphabet was invented before or after this cannot (I think) be certainly known, but my guess is that it was invented after 800: yet King Hektor has claims to be historical. He brought Chios into the Panionion, and we are told that, when he did this, he was awarded a tripod by the Panionians: no doubt the tripod was extant in historic times and was known as 'King Hektor's tripod'. This would all be easier if the tripod had borne some brief inscription 'King Hektor from the Panionians' or the like: but if King Hektor's generation could not write, such an inscription could not be contemporary.

I do not wish to dogmatize on this slippery topic. If Hektor's Chios was not literate it was on the verge of literacy. It is not impossible to imagine ways, other than a contemporary inscription, in which his achievement could be remembered: perhaps his tripod was inscribed a generation or so after the event. It is possible, of course, that Chios was literate earlier than I suppose, or (indeed) that King Hektor lived later than I suppose. My chief reason for not accepting (as Wilamowitz did) this last alternative lies in the pedigree of Heropythos. This is one of the most valuable of all Greek pedigrees, and it comes from the island of Chios.

D. THE PEDIGREE OF HEROPYTHOS [Fig. 1]

The gravestone of Heropythos, which now serves as the altar in a small village church on the south-east coast of Chios, contains what may well be the most authentic of all ancient Greek pedigrees. In a beautiful fifth-century hand it gives the name of Heropythos, whose gravestone it is, and of his fourteen ancestors.²⁵ None of them is a God, none probably even a hero, certainly none of them is a famous hero: they are probably all authentically human, and no doubt go back to the time of the Hellenic Conquest. I would not care to date it very narrowly: if we put Heropythos' death



Fig. 1. THE PEDIGREE OF HEROPYTHOS

Ηροπυθο	το Μανδραγορευω	το Ορσικλεος
το Φιλαιο	το Ερασιω	το Ιπποτιωνος
το Μικκυλο	το Ιπποτιωνος	το Εκασ
το Μανδροκ(λ)εος	το Εκαιδεω	το Ελδιο
το Αυτοσθενης	το Ιπποσθενης	το Κυπριο

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