SOME EASTERN TRADITIONS IN GREEK THOUGHT

by B. C. Dietrich
(Rhodes University, Grahamstown)

'It was only—if I may so put it—the day before yesterday,' says Herodotus (II, 53), 'that the Greeks came to know the origin and form of the various gods, and whether or not all of them had always existed; for Homer and Hesiod, the poets who composed our theogonies and described the gods for us, giving them all their appropriate titles, offices, and powers, lived, as I believe, not more than four hundred years ago.' (Selincourt's transl.)

Herodotus' pro-Egyptian inclinations never found much following; but the almost religious mystique which attached to the names of Homer and Hesiod in classical Greece bent the mind of theological thinkers then, as it has infected the work of many modern scholars and teachers. Greek religion did not arise out of chaos or void, it was not suddenly devised in the young Iron Age by the efforts of one or even several poets, but rather it represented the sum of a variety of factors which acted on the peninsula from without for many centuries, perhaps even from before the third millennium B.C.

It is wrong to believe in a unique Hellenic experience of the sixth and fifth centuries: the evolution of Greek thought belonged in its Aegean and, indeed, Mediterranean context. Otto Gruppe, in the last century, first suggested an examination of eastern religions which might cast some light on Greek cults and myth. In more recent years students of Greek religion can also draw from the knowledge of philologists who have found Asia Minor, and Anatolia in particular, a fertile field for comparative linguistics. Yet the process of this particular aspect of comparative religion is slow, in fact impossible, without the full evaluation of archaeological finds. Thus Wilamowitz still, in his work on Hellenic belief, finds himself not at home in analogies of cult between east and west, but in explaining Greek practices often falls prey to his own ingenuity. Farnell, again, in his Wilde Lectures on Greece and Babylon, yet lacks sufficient evidence for his work, for he cannot decipher Hittite script, nor does he know of Canaanite beliefs in pre-Israelite Syria, because the Ras Shamra tablets had not yet been read, and Philo of Byblos to Farnell was little more than a slavish Greek imitator.

1. This paper is a revised version of that read at the Classical Association Meeting in Pretoria on 6th February 1965.
4. L. R. Farnell, Greece and Babylon, Edinburgh 1911.
5. E.g. op. cit., 179.
Meanwhile, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the present century, a group of scholars like Tylor,6 Lang,7 Frazer8 and Harrison9 used what one may call the anthropological approach in an attempt to understand a wider portion of Greek religious thought.10 This method does not greatly concern us at present, except that we wish to draw from it some important parts played by popular belief in the shaping of classical Greek religion. In this respect we need not share Miss Harrison's distaste for the 'Heathen devices',11 but gratefully accept and interpret what knowledge we can cull from sources which, however, we have to admit at this point, are usually late and almost always post-Homeric. Yet by their nature and content they do allow the student an insight into traditions dating back to prehistoric times.

On this occasion I want briefly to examine one aspect that played a significant role in the development of Greek religion: the influence exerted on the nature and functions of the gods of Greece from the eastern part of the Mediterranean: from Anatolia, Syria and Mesopotamia, at times via the island of Crete. I want to establish the existence of parallel systems of divine families in the east and in Mycenaean Greece, followed by an outline of the early Greek—that is chiefly Homeric—contributions to inherited traditions which were to give birth to that peculiarly Hellenic freedom from religious fear in man's relationship with his gods and in his understanding of the working of fate.

The importance of eastern influence on the western Aegean is only now being fully realized with the help of our growing knowledge of the distribution of pottery on the one hand, and linguistic studies on the other. To explain this east west movement, the early cultural rise and predominance of oriental peoples from neolithic times, we must remember a vital change in the mode of life in this part of the world. The near and middle east saw the first shift from what scholars named the food-gathering stage of society—an unsettled, nomadic existence—to that of food-producing

7. A. Lang, *Myth, Ritual and Religion* 1901, I, II.
10. Their work is well known and extremely useful particularly with regard to prehistoric popular cults; its value, however, is not consistently high, because these scholars often went too far in drawing close analogies between cultures which had no possible common bond but were deeply separated both geographically and in time (cf. Pettazzoni, op. cit., 30 ff.). In consequence we saw some misguided theories quickly rise and happily resubmerge in obscurity, such as the belief in a period of totemism in Greek belief as expressed by Prof. Cook (A. B. Cook, 'Animal Worship in the Mycenaean Age', *J.H.S.* XIV (1894). Cf. S. Reinach, *Culte, Mythes et Religions* 5 vols. 1905–23, for largely similar views).
society, which involved the introduction of agriculture and with it the building of walled cities, inhabited by settled communities paying obeisance to a type of fertility Mother Goddess, who played the predominant part in its religious life. This change occurred about the fifth and sixth millennia B.C. and precipitated the development of new skills within the community: the working of metal for example.

There are a few localities which can be isolated as cult centres from the middle of the fourth millennium, such as Tell-Halaf—extending from the Taurus to Syria—, Uruk, Haçilar and Çatal Hüyük, north of Cilicia, the last of which has left many traces in place names with the suffix -nd/t or -s(s), as well as in art forms, like the manufacture and decoration of pottery: here, for instance, we can discover a predilection for torsion on the zone and the first examples of handles on pottery. Even though these neolithic and chalcolithic centres spread their influence over relatively wide neighbouring areas, they were largely isolated from one another. And yet, owing their development to the same motive of cultural adaptation to an agricultural society, they shared a few common basic features, such as the all-important Mother Goddess, already mentioned, and probably the Tammuz type figure of a young vegetation god. 12

However, the beginning of the Bronze Age, early in the third millennium B.C., witnessed the rise of the brilliant Sumerian culture from which, in some measure, radiated a unifying religious complex extending across the land of the two rivers northwards across Syria into large portions of western and central Anatolia, and providing what I should like to call a religious koine regarding the names of the most important gods and their functions.

The basis of this achievement must have been the Sumerian invention of writing, a vital tool which created a hieros logos that could be followed, albeit at times in altered form. An important factor for later Greek religious development was the largely common religious estate of the near east, for this found its way west across the Aegean in a one-sided movement from the beginning of the Bronze Age and slightly earlier. The routes of this movement are traced with care by Prof. Schachermeyr. 13 Along them, over a number of centuries, there travelled much new knowledge to Greece, including the skill of agriculture with the attendant foundation of city-states which assumed the familiar features of vegetation religion.

12. Allied to this belief was, of course, the practice of the annual fertilization of nature by a hieros gamos, one example of which consisted in a pair of suggestive clay statuettes, fashioned in a form already known from palaeolithic times, from Haçilar and reproduced in the Journal of Anatolian Studies (XI, 1961, pl. 10a). The Mother Goddess type we can already see in two palaeolithic figures from Malta (in J. Evans, Malta, figs. 57, 61).

The ‘Kulturtrift’, indeed, ran on beyond the confines of the Greek peninsula, but north of the Danube met with impenetrable opposition, described by archaeologists as the ‘Bandkeramischer Kreis’. Thus Greece’s willingness to submit to the new ideas won for her a cultural advantage over northern Europe of over two thousand years. A secondary movement, predominantly from Egypt—which in the third millennium drew level with Sumerian artistic achievement—and from North Africa, ran its course westward and to the north where it found a permanent home in Crete. Like Greece, this island in this way first changed over to agricultural habits, we might suppose, in opposition to Willett’s view\(^\text{14}\) that Crete achieved this step autonomously. This early eastern influence on Greece established close cultural links, as for instance between Sesklo and Haçilar where the west absorbed and continued eastern tradition. Crete, too, in the development of its own culture from Early Minoan to M.M. III times, bore the mark of that of Egypt and North Africa which, in some measure, it assimilated and carried north to the mainland in a one-way route, certainly until 1700 B.C.

Thus from the end of the chalcolithicum we follow the birth and growth of what can be called an Aegean community, including the Cyclades, Cyprus, and in the west Crete and Greece.\(^\text{15}\)

Now the turn of the third and second millennia ushered in a number of upheavals which brought about the dissolution, or rather the separation of our community. In Mesopotamia Semitic nomads of greater political and military ability replaced the Sumerians, just as the Hyksos put an end to the Middle Kingdom in Egypt, at about 1800 B.C. Indo-European elements, from which derived the Hurrians, Luvians and Hittites, for example, were already present in Asia Minor in the third millennium, but it was only the beginning of the next which witnessed their military expansion from the north throughout Syria down to northern Mesopotamia. In the western Aegean Indo-European groups, the forefathers of the Greeks, invaded Hellas about the same time, or slightly earlier in 1950, if we follow Schacher-


\(^{15}\) This community had not only linguistic and cultural ties, but more specifically observed religious practices concerned with a Mother Goddess of nature, which was imagined to come to life and die annually, an event symbolically represented by a youthful vegetation god, and which was annually revitalized by a *hieros gamos*. Such a religion, indeed, must emphasize the female element of fertility; but we need not therefore insist with Schachermeyr (*D. min. Kult.*, e.g. 14, 126-8) that the whole of this Aegean community was matrarchically oriented; and I am not in this context considering the term in its strict anthropological connotation as defined by A. E. Jensen (*Studium Generale* III (1950) 418-33). Against this militates too much evidence from the predominantly male pantheon in Babylonia, Assyria and presumably in Sumeria whose structure would not significantly have differed in pre-Semitic times. Consider, too, the awkward fact that the Egyptian Geb—god of earth—was male. What traces we find even in Greece of feminine domination in this province may well owe its existence to Cretan influence. Therefore, we must leave this difficult question of matriarchy in the east and in Greece unsolved at present.
meyr, and founded strongholds in the Argolid, in Pylos, Athens, Orchomenus, and as far north as Thessaly. This time marked a period of secondary contact between east and west, which was no longer one-sided: Cretan culture reached its peak under the protection of a powerful navy in the three hundred years from 2000 to 1700; she plied her trade with Syria and Egypt, as well as exerting a cultural influence to the north on the mainland of Greece. The Indo-European Achaeans also made their presence felt in the eastern Aegean on the island of Rhodes, probably on the Syrian coast-line, and in Anatolia where they proved to be powerful rivals of the Hittites.

This very broad historical outline paints a vivid picture of the continual contact between east and west from pre-historic times, for only in this way can we understand a number of religious concepts which found their way to Greece from Asia Minor, but which often assumed a new significance when cast in the Hellenic mould.

Earlier on I spoke of a religious koine observed throughout a large part of the near and middle east, that is a congruence of religious concepts which took their beginning probably in Mesopotamia under the rule of Sumer, Akkad, and Babylon. The type of concept I want to consider for a moment concerns some common motifs first formulated in Sumeria, whence they spread to succeeding cultures in Mesopotamia, and to the north by virtue of the new script.

The extant fragments of Sumerian mythology show us the basic features of this kind of literature, containing the creation of heaven and earth—a unity at first—and their separation, as well as the names of deities representing the elemental powers. The name and province of such deities became universal coinage in Asia Minor, for they were accepted by later cultures with the same astonishing equanimity and tolerance with which Cyphrus took over the neo-Babylonian gods when he sacked Babylon in 539 B.C. Prof. Kramer renders for us the introduction of a Sumerian poem which had been translated into Akkadian as part of a standard liturgical text: ‘After Heaven had been moved away from Earth,’ it runs, ‘after Earth had been separated from Heaven, after the name of man had been fixed; after An had carried off Heaven, after Enlil had carried off Earth’. This brief excerpt shows the separation of Earth from Heaven, either by peaceful means or not, prior to the creation of life on earth. In the poem, too, we meet the names of An, or Anu in its Semitic form, as the god of the sky, Enil the god of the Earth, Enki, Ea in the Babylonian form, as the god of water. In the beginning Earth and Sky—An-ki—formed a unity until separated by Enil. Anu, Enil, and Ea reappeared in Babylonian and Hurrian mythology as figures of signal importance in a pantheon which,

however, for political reasons became more complex with the passage of time. Thus, for example, Enlil as leader of the gods was supplanted by Marduk, originally chief of the Babylonian pantheon, while he, in turn, had to yield pride of place to the Assyrian Assur. Yet Enlil never disappeared, nor did Anu, but the former, in a word, became a supernumerary in a divine dynasty of which we find the first continuous evidence in Babylon.

The general retention of the original divine system in other eastern myths—Indo-European and Semitic—, the names of gods either assimilated in the new language or side by side with indigenous deities caused some confusion as witness the variety of ideogrammes in, for instance, the Hittite texts. Here we meet with Alalush, Anush, Ellilush, and A’ash, the phonetic equivalent in Hittite to the Babylonian Ea. With this common ground, therefore, it is not surprising that from the various centres of eastern culture there emerged creation and theogonic myths which observed a similar pattern: this we notice in the Hurrian story of Kumarbi from Bogazköy, in the Akkadian Enuma Elish and in the tale of Sanchuniathon, as recorded by Philo of Byblos.

The story which serves our purposes best is the epic of Kumarbi, falling, so Gueterbock remarks, into three parts, (1) the struggle for the kingship of heaven, (2) the song of Ullikummi, (3) the story of the Flood. The tale of the heavenly kingship spoke of three generations of gods: Alalu, Anu, and Kumarbi. Each, the son of his predecessor, wrested the kingship from his father, where a typical feature of the seizure consisted in the emasculation of the deposed god. Thus Kumarbi, in his struggle against Anu, bit off the parts of Anu. These he spat upon the earth which as a consequence gave birth, among others, to the storm or weather god. Significantly, however, before the birth of the weather god, Kumarbi fearful of his safety as ruling god undertook to swallow the offspring of Anu’s seed. As far as can be gathered from the fragmentary text at this point, Kumarbi was given a diorite stone in place of the weather god; the stone was subsequently blessed by Ea, the god of water and wisdom, and set up as an object of worship for men. At the end of this part of the epic, it seems that Kumarbi, too, was replaced by the weather god as supreme ruler. The song of Ullikummi dealt with Kumarbi’s contest against the storm god. Once more the diorite stone played a vital part in the story, for Kumarbi begot on it a stone monster—Ullikummi—which, placed on the shoulders of Upelluri, an Atlas-like figure, grew to the abode of the gods and threatened the storm god whose Hurrian name was Teshub. Teshub, on Ea’s advice, fetched the knife with which Heaven and Earth had been severed, and with it Ullikummi from the

shoulders of Upelluri, thereby rendering the monster powerless.

These two parts of the epic, the story of the Flood apart, drawing from Hurrian and ultimately Babylonian and other related eastern legends, revealed a pattern which obviously, in its main features, was taken over by Hesiod in his *Theogony*. The connection was noticed by Forrer,\(^{19}\) and carefully analyzed by Gueterbock,\(^{20}\) who even constructed a comparative table of a dynastic succession in Babylonian, Hurrian, Phoenician belief, and in Hesiod.\(^{21}\) The factor common to all versions was a progression from the god of heaven down to the weather god: Marduk, respectively Enlil, Teshub, Baal, and Zeus, except that, aside from Hesiod, all legends added a prior element before the sky god Anu or Uranos.

With minor differences Hesiod's dependence on the eastern pattern is evident: in the Greek version the story of Kumarbi's indigestible stone was *mutato nomine* repeated. The actor in this case was the *omphalos*, honoured by Zeus and worshipped at Delphi. Also consider Hesiod's tale of the monster Typhon, added to his *Theogony* as an afterthought. Typhon, we will recall, was born in Cilicia, and Zeus pursued and slew him on *Mons Casius*, the classical name for Mt. Hazzi, where Ullikummi threatened the reign of Teshub.

Not all of Hesiod was borrowed, of course; the concept of Eros, for example, was the fruit of his own lucubration, while the account of the Five Ages has memories of popular tradition.\(^{22}\) These are details, however, which await a careful analysis and evaluation in a study on Hesiodic sources. Let us confine ourselves to basic conceptions which Hesiod made available for Greece in a more or less concise form, but which he already found present in the west, because they had been brought across the Aegean during centuries of cultural contact: either *via* the Hittites as intermediaries in Anatolia and Syria, as Forrer supposes,\(^{23}\) or through the agency of the Phoenicians, according to Gueterbock and Barnett, or by way of Crete, or, most likely of all, through all these routes from the beginning of the Bronze Age.

22. For the story of the Five Ages in the *W. & D.* see B. C. Dietrich, *Death, Fate, and the Gods*, London 1965, Append. VIII, 352–7. The concept of the Isle of the Blest may derive from Egyptian tradition, see Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and its Survival in Greek Religion*, Lund 1950, 629 f. It is interesting to note in this connection that the formulation of abstracts is not solely due to Hesiod, as is usually thought, but also derives from Babylonian and Phoenician practice. Thus, for example, the Hesiodic Eunomia and Dike are equivalent to the Akkadian Kitu and Mesharu.
23. See Barnett in *J.H.S.* LXV (1945), 101, who cites Forrer and Gueterbock.
The most disturbing elements to later Greek thought, excluded from their pantheon by the Indo-European invaders, were the two antecedents of Zeus: Uranos and Kronos, representing first the Sky as primal element and secondly Kronos, a god of vegetation and the harvest, related to the Phoenician Dagan, as the divider of the Sky and Earth. Zeus himself, of course, was the Indo-European name of the weather god superimposed on the deity found in Greece and notably Crete, imported from the east centuries before, who was destined to wrest the divine kingship from his father. This Zeus we may perhaps identify with the Kretagenes, the god born, according to Hesiod (Theog. 484), on Mt. Ida. The Greek Zeus did not fit this part of the history too well, wherefore he lost the Cretans their reputation for truthfulness in the eyes of serious mythographers like Callimachus (Jupp. 8), who knew beyond doubt that the highest Olympian could not be mortal.

All versions repeated three concepts with a bearing on later Greek development. The first concerned the separation of Heaven from Earth, the second the dynastic progression of either three or four generations, and the third the cruelty with which this progression was achieved. The first of these is of somewhat minor value to a comparative study between east and west, because, as a cosmogonic feature, it was too popular among primitive mythologies to be of much use to the student of Greek religion. Separation legends were prominent in many other cultures from New Zealand to Japan, similar enough in content to be classified together in the studies by Numazawa and Staudacher. Nonetheless they were an intrinsic portion of our creation stories, and can explain an otherwise puzzling feature of the divine succession. The dynastic progression was the central point of our epics: it consisted, as we noticed, of three or four links which stood for a primal element—except in Hesiod—followed by the god of Heaven, a general god of vegetation or corn, and the weather god. Perhaps

24. K. Numazawa, Die Weltenanfänge in der japanischen Mythologie, Zürich–New York 1950; W. Staudacher, Die Trennung von Himmel und Erde, 1942, cited by U. Bianchi, Dios Aisa, Rome 1953, 151 n.1. Nonetheless even the Babylonian and Greek epics know of differences in detail that deserve to be noted. Thus in the Enuma Elish the separation takes place after the creation of the important gods and life on earth; only then does Marduk sever Tiamat to form the two parts: heaven and earth. In Hesiod, however, and in the Kumarbi epic the separation is implied as happening in the beginning, so that we are closer here to the Sumerian story where at the beginning An carried off heaven and Enlil carried off earth. Further, the Kumarbi epic knows of a second, almost symbolic, act of separation when Teshub on Ea’s command fetches the ‘copper knife with which they had parted heaven and earth’, and with it cuts the monster Ullikummi from Updlluris shoulders. We are no longer in a position to answer how much this duplication owes to outside influence, or how the closely connected story of the Flood fits into the structure, nor can we here go into detail concerning the types of separation myths as established by Numazawa.
Forrer and Gueterbock\textsuperscript{25} are correct in believing the Babylonians to have invented this system. Judging from the Mesopotamian religious tradition, however, we may, with Prof. Hooke,\textsuperscript{26} suspect at least the germ of this idea to have been present in Sumerian myth, for the close similarity of all the oriental divine generations with their common features makes it appear as if we are here dealing with a pattern, a pattern of kingship, in fact, modelled, as it were, on that of a city-state in a theocratic society.

The pattern I speak of is closely related to that shown to have existed in the east by Hooke,\textsuperscript{27} whose argument overruled Prof. Frankfort's\textsuperscript{28} reservations. The vital features of the kingship pattern consisted in the periodic renewal of the royal office, together with a complex of ritual designed to celebrate the return of vegetation symbolically, either by the release of the vegetation god from captivity, or by his rebirth, followed by a sacred marriage to refertilize nature. In Babylon the periodic renewal occurred during the New Year festival, on which occasion the creation epic was solemnly recited. Now this periodic festival dealt both with the enthronization of Marduk and with the reconsecration of the king, drawing new strength for his divinely appointed office from a communion with his god. On each occasion Marduk, or under similar circumstances Assur, or the equivalent god, relived his struggle for divine kingship, a struggle which, one feels, was intimately connected with the contest of nature's elemental forces on one hand, and the cyclical—that is growing and dying—form of human kingship on the other, whose representative in any case was often divine himself.

Much of this remains conjecture; let me nonetheless cite one example which not only suggests a cycle, but also reveals that the oriental conception of kingship had a definite impact on Greek religion beyond Hesiod's acceptance of the outward mechanics of the genealogical system. In the Hurrian epic of Kumarbi Alalu reigned for nine years before he was deposed by Anu who in turn, after a period of nine years, yielded to Kumarbi. The figure nine is important: it implies a definite temporal rhythm, such as we find elsewhere in the office of kingship: namely in Crete as well as in Greece. Homer, in the nineteenth Book of the Odyssey (179) spoke of Minos who was king of Knossos for nine years—ἐνέκαρος βασιλέας—and the bosom friend of Zeus. This quote we can interpret with the help of Plato, Laws (624d), as meaning that Minos every nine years retired to the cave of Zeus—originally of a Minoan deity—where he renewed his kingship.

Connected with this periodic renewal is the famous story in Plutarch's

\textsuperscript{25} Kumarbi, 106, where the reference to Forrer is given.
\textsuperscript{26} E.g. S. H. Hooke, Babylonian and Assyrian Religion, Oxford 1962, 58.
\textsuperscript{28} For references see Hooke, ibid. Cf. H. Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods, Chicago 1948, 295 and n. 1 on p. 405.
Life of Theseus (15) of the tribute of seven youths and seven maidens sent to Knossos every nine years, as well as Delphic and Theban festivals, like the Daphnophoria, which, recurring in nine-year intervals, point the same way. Compare with this the story Plutarch again tells in his Life of Age-silaus (11), according to which the Spartan ephors watched the night sky every ninth year, and, if they saw a shooting star, the king might be deposed.29

The oriental rhythmic cycle of kingship in this way made its impression on Greece; but in Hesiod's Theogony we find the eastern genealogical system stripped of its basic significance and subordinated to a theology which did not give a full account of its sources. Therefore the cruelty with which Kronos usurped supreme power from Uranos was senseless, because its original religious context had been ignored or forgotten. The savage manner in which Kronos deposed Uranos, was similar to that found in the Kumarbi epic and, of course, carried the same significance, as when Marduk cut Tiamat in half: 'He split her like a shellfish into two parts: Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky, pulled down the bar and posted guards'.30

The act, in each instance, referred to the separation of Heaven and Earth accomplished by a sword, copper knife, or sickle. The separation symbolically released fertility and life into the world, as we can see from the emasculation of the sky-god31—an essential ingredient in the Greek and Hurrian myths—which served to create some of the first vegetation powers, like the river Tigris, chthonic beings, like the Erinyes, the Melian Nymphs, and even the storm-god himself in the Kumarbi epic.

For more detail we should scrutinize the accounts by Apollodorus and Nonnus. At present we merely want to extract the general principle that underlay the common motif, namely the symbolic representation of the beginning of life in which the emasculation scene played an important part describing the parting of the primal male and female elements, and the first fertilization of Earth as a separate entity. Here Hesiod still betrayed his sources: Gaia, indeed, conceived her children from Uranos, but she was yet one with the Sky and felt confined by her children hidden within her, wherefore she prepared the drepanon or harpe with which Kronos performed his deed. It is no coincidence that Kronos represented a deity of vegetation, and that the Hesiodic harpe, as Nilsson shows,32 was the common Greek implement from pre-historic times for the reaping of the harvest.

The basic features of the creation myths we studied, reveal that we are dealing with what I have called a rhythmical pattern intimately joined

31. For the view that castration merely signified loss of sovereignty see J. Gwyn Griffiths, The Conflict of Horus and Seth, Liverpool 1960, 39 n. 1.
with the birth and development of life and vegetation. Such a cyclical
conception was utterly incompatible with the later Greek belief in the history
and value of its gods who had to be permanent and immortal or else be
denied admittance to the pantheon. Greek feeling was already lucidly
reflected in Hesiod's theology, for there the divine genealogy was largely
devoid of its oriental significance. The central figure was Zeus, and it is
from the point of Zeus' eternal, unalterable rule that the earlier stages
were considered. Uranos had no standing in the Greek family of gods;
Kronos, when all is said and done, was a mythological figure in classical
Greece, not a cultic one. He was the god of the Golden Age, no rites were
celebrated in his honour; apart from a statue beside Zeus and Hera\textsuperscript{33} in
Lebadeia, no image was dedicated to him. His only temple was that built
by Peisistratus who took his model from Olympia.

Hesiod was by no means unique in acknowledging his eastern debt for
his genealogical structure; the same held true for Homer, although contrary
to Herodotus' claim, he never composed a theogony. Yet Homer, astonish-
ingly enough, assigned a place to the fourth and earliest link in the divine
generations: the 'Urpotenz' water, the logical primal element—Tiamat—in
Mesopotamian society. In \textit{Iliad} XIV Oceanus was the father of the
gods: Hypnos spoke of him as the primary force (246); Hera, too, set
out to go to the bounds of the earth, to Oceanus the γένσει των 
gods. Compare with this \textit{Iliad} IV, 59, where Kronos' title of ἀγκολομήτης
might well have presupposed a knowledge of the dread fate of his father.\textsuperscript{34}

In short, the Homeric poets loyally remembered the four true generations:
Oceanus, Uranos, Kronos, and Zeus. The weather-god, Zeus in Homer's
tongue, yet ruled a pantheon and divine administration which, like the
locality of its home, was firmly grounded on oriental precedent. Prof.
Nilsson\textsuperscript{35} first proved that the Homeric family was largely modelled on
the similarly constructed human society. The gods, as befit a ruling class,
lived a life of ease in abodes like those of men, except that their dwellings
were fashioned of gold by Hephaestus. All in all, the divine society was
a replica of that of Mycenaean royalty. We may now add to Nilsson's
fundamental discovery that the Homeric divine system represented a
peculiarly Greek interpretation of religious concepts which greatly ante-date
Mycenae, which in fact travelled to Greece, and, as far as we can determine,
to Crete, once again from Mesopotamia along the routes I have already
described.

To begin with, the extreme humanity of the Homeric gods found its
parallel and probable source in the Sumerian pantheon whose antropo-

\textsuperscript{33} Paus. ix. 39.4.

\textsuperscript{34} H. Schwabl, \textit{op. cit.} (see n. 18) 1483, first noticed this epithet as a probable memory
of Uranos' emasculation.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Op. cit.} (see n. 9) 372 f.
morphism strongly contrasted with the hybrid forms and zoomorphism of Egyptian belief. Their intense belief in the human form of their gods compelled the Mesopotamian artists to go to strange but not unequalled lengths in depicting the all-knowing, all-seeing divine powers. Thus gods were drawn with two heads, or two faces like the Roman Janus Bifrons. Marduk, like Assur, possessed two pairs of eyes and ears to exemplify their super-human powers in human shape. With this idea we might compare the many representations on Cretan seals of human ears and eyes floating in mid-air, emblems of the all-seeing, all-hearing deity. In Homer likely parallels are Zeus’ epithets μητίετα and perhaps πανόμφαιος.

What of eastern memory in the structure of the Homeric divine family itself? It is common knowledge that the Olympians were constituted of diverse elements from different centres: protectors of cities, like Hera at Argos and Athene at Athens, were placed cheek by jowl beside deities of localised cult, or divinities of nature. Abdicating their narrow responsibilities within a particular city-state, they were collected—perhaps first by the Homeric poets—and arrayed in a closely knit family. Πατήρ Ζεύς was at the head of the family, father, for instance, of Athene, Artemis and Apollo, and brother of Poseidon, as well as of Hades in the underworld. His consort Hera, again, was the mother of Hephaestus, and so on.

Now the Mesopotamian divine structure had the same background and was fashioned in like manner, although its pantheon grew in proportion to the mise-en-scène of new political powers, like the Akkadians and Assyrians whose own imports of gods were forthwith integrated in the expanding family. Thus Enlil, originally chief god of Nippur, became the father of Ningirsu, god of Lagash; Marduk of Babylonia found his place as son of Ea or Enki from Eridu. The situation became more intricate but obeyed the same principle, when the Akkadians introduced their Semitic Shamash of Sippar side by side with the older god Utu of Larsa who exercised equivalent functions. Even Innina, Uruk’s goddess of love, had to share her identity with Ishtar.

Both families of gods lived in the heavens which, in east and west,

36. Animals we do find associated with gods in Homer, as witness the eagle of Zeus or the speaking epithets γλαυκώτης and βοώτης of Athene and Hera. In Crete we see animals in association with gods on seals; in Mesopotamian art the eagle, lion, and serpent, too, are depicted, but these creatures do not necessarily hint at an earlier belief in zoomorphism: they merely serve as emblems of the deity to whom they are sacred. They are his defender, mount, or trusted companion which imparts to a particular god or goddess its qualities, that is, the strength of a lion, for example, the force of a bull, or perhaps even the fecundity of a cow. In the words of Edouard Dhorme, Les Religions de Babylone et d’Assyrie, Mana, Paris 1949, 18 f., ‘Far from allowing a god or goddess to descend to the rank of an animal, Mesop. art attempts to impart to animals human attitudes—attitudes humaines—which bring them near to man and permit them to associate with the religious life of men.’

37. E.g. II. I, 175; 508. II. 8, 250.
was on a mountain peak. There Teshub and his consort had their home threatened by Ullikummi. There Baal, too, had his palace built, so we gather from the poems about him and Aaath, 'He opens a casement in the house,' we hear in one poem, 'a window within the palace. Baal opens rifts in the clouds.—His holy voice convulses the earth, the mountains quake.'

The Homeric family dwelled on Olympus, a fairly common name in Greece, in the Aegean—as at Lesbos—and in the east, at Mysia, for instance. The word was pre-Greek, of eastern provenance, and simply meant 'mountain'; and, describing the abode of the gods, it travelled to Greece via the Mycenaean and Homer.

The divine family in structure reflected the human society of a city-state: both were patently hierarchical. The counterpart of the father of the gods was the king, in the east and in Crete and in Mycenae. Accordingly, the Homeric system at the least shared important features with the Mesopotamian divine structure, and did not, as Willetts supposes, exclusively derive from the newly evolved Mycenaean military kingship. The proof of this rests in the theocratic nature of the earliest city-state and in the function of its king who, at the peak of the human pyramid, yet was but the favoured servant of the divine father administering His city. The king was a priest-king, and his officials were priests in the direct service of their god. Thus the palace, which at the same time was, of course, the temple and worldly abode of the god, constituted the central point of the administration: to it the subjects paid their tithe and tax in kind, they brought the harvests of the divine fields. The palace had chambers and rooms where the god's produce was stored and carefully entered into the accounts of the priestly administrators.

39. Although in Homer's mind this was an abode more suitable to the weather god alone, for in two passages in the Iliad (13, 243; 16, 364) Zeus is imagined as inhabiting Olympus alone, when he casts down on men a thunderbolt or a storm. Cf. Nilsson, The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology, California 1932, 230.
40. Of course, I am somewhat oversimplifying here. We must remember that the peak of a mountain provided a home for another type of oriental deity who had no place in the Olympian system, and that is the Mother Goddess who also emigrated to Crete, where she was revered in important cult localities as on Mt. Jouktas, at Petsopha and Maza, and in other peak sanctuaries of the kind we see depicted on the just published steatite rhyton from Kato Zakro (in Archaeological Reports for 1963–64, J.H.S., A. H. S. Megaw, 'Archaeology in Greece', pp. 29 f. and fig. 39).
41. Op. cit. (see n. 14) 118. Cf. Nilsson's related views in op. cit. (see n. 39) 221 ff. It would take us too far afield to discuss these opinions at length, but I should mention that these Frazer Lectures were read in 1931, some fifteen years before Gueterbock's work on the subject.
42. Because of this close relationship with his god, the priest-king became a god after death. The difference between Egyptian and Mesop. practice is striking: in the former the king was always a god—far removed from mortal man—his palace less than, but neverthe-
Our evidence, mostly of an archaeological nature for Greece and Crete, is just good enough to make our point in broad outline. Sir A. Evans already correctly described the Cretan ruler as a priest-king, working from the most telling evidence: the architecture and central function of the palace. In recent years the weight of evidence has increased, although its precise interpretation yet remains open to doubt. Philologists like Meillet, Wackernagel, and Kretschmer, for example, have established a very early linguistic substratum—called Aegean by Schachermeyr—common to Crete, Mycenaean Greece, and the Asian countries where the practice of priest-kings obtained. Here we find words like Minos, Knossos, and above all a common word for king—basileus. Both Minoses at Knossos—for there were two between 1600 and 1400 B.C.—were priest-kings—basileis, so was Agamemnon at Mycenae. The title faded away into a memory at Athens, where the archon basileus exercised his old priestly functions at the Eleusinian Mysteries, or presided over the Council which met in the King’s Porch.

By far the most exciting echo of the former function and position of the basileus comes to us not from state practice but, as often, from popular cult, from the ancient festival of the Anthesteria. Here we discover a cheerful contamination of old and new which awaits the toil of a patient scholar. Not far below the layer of confusion, exemplified by the Greeks’ appointing two deities—Dionysus and Hermes—for the three festive days, there yet remains the unity of a New Year type celebration—like the Babylonian Nisan, designed to renew the power of the priest-king through communion with his god, as well as grant new life to nature by means of the hieros gamos.

The palace in Crete was the central point of the city. Its plan, reconstructed, shows us the same type of magazines and stores we found in

---

43. E.g. The Palace of Minos, London 1921, I, 224.
46. Cf. Willetts, op. cit. (see n. 14) 83.
47. This we can deduce from the conflicting statements of Herodotus (I, 171) and Thucydides (I, 4).
Mesopotamia; here too the produce of the land and of Cretan craftsmanship was kept, administered presumably by priest-officials who, as we gather from the tablets, made their accounts with the same bureaucratic care. The entire palace was pervaded by religious elements: the frescoes on the walls were connected with religious practice, so were, of course, the various rooms used as shrines; the Throne Room itself obviously served a religious purpose. On the pillars, altars, pottery in shrines, on seals, and elsewhere, appeared the ubiquitous sign of the double axe, the labrys—an interesting word,—for not only was it etymologically connected with the labyrinth at Knossos, but gave his name to the Carian Zeus Labrandeus. The word and its religious import were eastern, therefore; more specifically they derived from Caria, or, according to Plutarch, from neighbouring Lydia, both cultures which perhaps were part of the Lukka lands—provinces of the Hittite empire—and therefore in close contact with Mesopotamian religion. Again, with one doubtful L.M.I. exception at Gurnia, the so-called domestic cult was confined to the palace, where the priest-king stood in a special relationship with his deity.

This, alas, is as far as our evidence will carry us with some certainty. The Cretan basileus was modelled on his Mesopotamian counterpart and suggested a similar theocratic society, but can we follow Evans, J. Forsdyke and Willetts in identifying him with the youthful prince on the so-called Priest-King Relief at Knossos, or on the Chieftain Vase from Hagha Triada? Or was he the same as the young god depicted on an electrum ring from Mycenae, engaged, as Evans puts it, in a sacra conversazione with a goddess? Are we not in fact stretching our evidence, when we identify the king with the youthful male figure often engraved on seals?

We must also note the seeming absence of a divine family, equivalent to that in the east and in Mycenaean Greece. What deities there were, appear to have been mainly feminine, of the Mother Goddess and Palace Goddess type, who stood in a special protective relationship with the king and his household. Until we can read the Cretan script, we can only suppose that common beginnings of kingship notwithstanding, the Minoan concept of divinity does not appear to have developed along analogous hierarchical lines, as we saw in the east, and as happened on the mainland. The clue to this startling divergence we may find in the unmatched political stability

48. See Nilsson, op. cit. (see n. 22) 223.
49. Quaest. graec. 301F.
50. Nilsson, op. cit. (see n. 22) 80.
51. Palace of Minos, II, 253; 774–95.
of the island, described by Pendlebury and Schachermeyr, at least until the L.M. period. Perhaps the Knossian dynasty had reigned supreme and thus made war futile; quite certainly the various centres lived side by side in harmony and offered no opportunity for political, and consequently religious absorption of the kind we observed in Mesopotamia, and are familiar with from mythology in Mycenaean Greece.

The Mycenaean palaces, based on the Cretan model and dating throughout the Helladic period, like those at Mycenae, Tiryns, and especially at Pylos, give evidence of the same kind of system. The Cretan type cult paraphernalia found, for example, in Asine and Mycenae, bespeak an identical domestic cult in the Mycenaean centres. The king’s palace was the sole place of worship, and from it, Nilsson tells us, subsequently developed the temples of public worship, for as the might of the Achaean kingship declined the palace became the locality of the god’s home. Thus we notice Hera’s temple constructed over the palace at Tirynth, and Athene’s at Athens. During the era of Mycenaean greatness, the priest-king, presumably at the head of a similar hierarchical structure in his palace, we discussed, also was closely bound to his deity and protector. Clear traces of such a relationship remained in Greek epic, where Athene played the part of personal guardian of Heracles, or she helped Jason build the Argo. Like the kingship, the divine interest and assistance were hereditary: thus Athene defended not only Odysseus but also Telemachus his son. So, too, Diomede in the Iliad inherited Athene’s guardianship from his father Tydeus.

What has been said so far contains a fair quantum of proof that Mycenae borrowed certain features of the priest-king system together with the belief in a chief deity at the head of a theocratic society; her creditor, both directly and indirectly, in large measure was the east. Crete, we may be sure, went her own way in religious practices which, to judge from our insufficient evidence, in its divine edifice did not always closely resemble eastern cult. Also, the Achaeans soon began to infuse their own thought into the assumed heritage. Changes in cult practice became evident from architectural innovations which reflected religious differences: the megaron in the palace and later temple is an illuminating example in this connection. Zeus, like his counterpart in the east, became the head of the Mycenaean pantheon. But the Mycenaeans also drew from other traditions: indeed a host of divinities—with speaking names in Greek—like Aphaea, Britomartis, Ariadne, Dictyna—found their way to the mainland. Many of these, however, were absorbed by more successful gods and goddesses, or, like Ariadne and Helen, they were given no significant place in the freshly

57. Absorption is perhaps too strong a word to describe probable historical events contained in the Theban cycle, and in the Theseus and Heracles myths.
evolving scheme, but passed into the shadowy realm of mythology.

The surviving deities were above all the guardian figures of the palace and Mycenaean city, like Athene and Hera, who now joined a wider group of gods, eventually to be gathered into the Homeric family of Olympians. Their history and origin have been carefully traced by Nilsson, and most recently summarized by Prof. Guthrie in a separate fascicule of the Cambridge Ancient History. From this history there emerges the notable fact that the Mycenaean pantheon consisted not only of Cretan borrowings, but also of gods—mostly powers of nature and wild life—who etymologically, or by reason of their functions, belonged to what we have named an Aegean substratum: that is, they were revered under different names in both east and west. Such gods included Athene, Artemis, Poseidon—the husband of Earth,—Apollo, and even Hermes. The family, so we saw, had some striking features in common with the eastern pantheon, because, I venture to suggest, it essentially was born in the same manner under similar circumstances, and it served the same purpose in the same kind of city-state; last but not least, the type of god included in the family enjoyed a common background in east and west.

Much has been made by modern scholars of the differences between the oriental and Greek pantheon. The eastern centralized despotism has been contrasted with the Mycenaean tribal city-state under the leadership of a military king. However, while we can say very little about the social structure of the Mesopotamian city of the fourth and third millennia, it has been my aim to illustrate the general identity of the religious structure of the cities on both sides of the Aegean. Our evidence for Mycenae admitted is thin, but what there is—and here I include the exposition of the Bronze Age and chalcolithic 'Kulturtrift' made at the beginning—can lead us only to one conclusion: we must expect in Mycenae and other mainland centres of the second millennium a similar theocratic despotism to have obtained. There is yet abundant proof of the king's tyrannical position and power throughout the Iliad and Odyssey. One instance that comes to mind in this connection is the famous scene from Iliad I, the very foundation of the menis, when Achilles, in grievous anger, was only a hair's breadth from slaying his king Agamemnon: but Athene counselled him to contain his wrath. She and Hera, who had sent Athene down from Heaven for this task, were bound to protect their king from the violence of one of his subjects, even though he was a δημόσιος βασιλεύς. Achilles submitted to ancient laws here and not to a poetic attempt at psychology, as Robert would have us believe.

61. Il. 1, 188 ff.
One difference certainly existed, but it goes some way to prove our point of Greek dependence on eastern practice. The Mycenaeans did not create their family of gods by political conquest, for the individual deities must have been brought across from the south and eventually east to various cities simultaneously. Nor did they themselves fashion this Olympian family: they assimilated parts of it from the east taking over a number of features from the oriental structure. Our best witnesses of this event are still Homer and Hesiod, and some isolated popular cults.

Thus far the bare outline of this religious migration; but our task is not done until we understand something of the parts in which Greek thought found itself at variance with the oriental religious attitude, and thus imposed changes on traditional stock to cut itself spiritually adrift from the east, even until fresh bonds were forged by Alexander the Great.

Into what new paths did Homer impel what was after all an older, borrowed, divine system and complex of beliefs? The wind of change became most obvious in the destiny of mortal man, and in his relationship to the gods. It was in this field that Homer and the Greeks stood in the strongest opposition to inherited dogma, for they freed themselves from the old position of servitude and bondage to their gods, at the cost, one might add, of what we call moral purpose. Yet this was a small price to pay for the release from a rigid theocratic society in which each man was the servant of a god.

When this release occurred we can no longer establish; we suspect, however, that it arose from the decay of the old priest-kingship concurrent with the dissolution, at the end of the second millennium, of the Mycenaean city-state, and the foundation of a new kind of Polis—held together not by tribal ties, but by the bonds of convenience. The acropolis of the new cities inherited the old pantheon—Zeus, Hera, Artemis and Athene still reigned supreme in a more or less harmonious family, but their relationship to the members of the city had altered. They had been progressively more humanized, partly under Mycenaean influence, and partly because in Homer the projection of the contemporary human on the divine society had become complete. The boundary of man’s influence—his mortality—

63. To appreciate these changes in detail, we should have to consider Homeric religion and contrast it with some popular cults, the latter of which retaining memories of those parts of Mycenaean and pre-historic religion which the Homeric poets discarded as eventually unsuitable for the narrow circle of society for whom the lays were composed. Popular religion, and by that I mean cults like the Eleusinian Mysteries, will guide the research to Cretan and eastern traditions imported into Greece, as well as mark out newly instituted practices, like hero-worship, which found its beginning in the Mycenaean age. In short, everything pertaining to a belief in after life for man was, with the exception of some vague memories, excluded from epic. Thus Homer, and consequently the developing Greek state religion, effectively suppressed the growth of a belief which could only subsequently flourish under Orphism and philosophy.
remained the same in Homer and the east. Notice, for instance, the Homeric ring in the moving lines from the Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh epic, when the hero in his quest for Utanapishtim—the Mesopotamian Deucalion—and the plant of life was upbraided by Siduri for aiming beyond his natural station, 'Gilgamesh', she said, 'whither rovest thou? The life thou pursuest thou shalt not find. When the gods created mankind, death for mankind they set aside, life in their own hands retaining. Thou, Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly, make thou merry by day and by night'.

Mortality apart, man was entirely free. The gods, in turn, provided they were paid their due in sacrifice and cult, did not make man account for his actions. Divine intervention in Homer was common, but occurred generally only to satisfy the whim of a particular god or group of gods. Thus the Greeks, in drawing from another tradition, left no room for any force of moral arbitration: Dike, in anything approaching our modern sense of justice, did not make her appearance before Aeschylus. We are all familiar with the enlightened criticism such singular negligence called forth from the early philosophers, from men like Xenophanes; what may excite our imagination more, however, is the fact that in this Homeric conception of man's release from the old divine bondage lay the seed of the subsequent classical Polis to its gods, an attitude which allowed the untrammelled secular development of architecture, sculpture and drama, all of which had their beginnings in the religious life of man.

Human spiritual freedom was the unscaleable barrier separating the west from eastern heritage, and nowhere was this divergence of beliefs better illustrated than in the altered concepts of fate. Whereas in Asia the religious calendar revolved about the New Year, the Nisan, or Akitu festivals, when men's destinies were fixed; and throughout Akkadian and Ugaritic literature the possession of the tablets of destiny set apart the supreme figure of the pantheon, like Marduk, Homer rejected any idea of a complex fate as a tool of divine government. There was only one fate

64. Egypt, again, is an exception to this, reflected strangely enough in the inconsistent tale of Elysium in the Odyssey (4, 563 f.).
65. Transl. by S. N. Kramer from the old Babylonian version III, 1-7.
66. Thus, in a way, men and gods in Homeric belief were similar: they were motivated by the same urges and desires, for, as Pindar still believed (in the sixth Nemean Ode, 1 f.), the race of gods and men was one drawing its breath of life from the same mother; but they lived on different planes separated only by the law of death.
67. To Homer and his audience the word conveyed no more than custom, usage, or order among human affairs, as they were established by men for their own society.
68. Indeed the gods did not remain as immoral as we see them in the Iliad: their carefree abandon is curtailed by the piety of theologians like Aeschylus and Pindar. Even the poets of the Odyssey already felt the stirrings of a critical spirit which is reflected in the trust of Eumaeus in the gods' sense of fair play (14, 83 f.) and, of course, in Zeus' speech in Book I (32 ff.), where he clearly attributes men's suffering to their own shameful lawlessness.
for man in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and that was his mortality, from which even Zeus could not deliver him, though the man be Sarpedon, his own son. Otherwise Homer knew of no great independent powers of fate. Concepts like *Moira* and *Aisa*, somewhat like the early *dike*, often described the intricate pattern of honour, custom, and tradition in Homeric society.

Thus the Mycenaeans and Homeric poets, who belonged to them by spirit and by blood, though they composed their songs across the Aegean, near the source of their religious beginnings, wove a multicoloured fabric to depict their gods; their material they drew directly or indirectly from eastern stock.

But for man in the Homeric poems somehow life had become easier, less tied to ritual servitude, or subject to religious fear; the only rules that bound him were those devised by his fellow men; these, I know, were kinder than the stern eastern laws separating man from god. We need merely glance at a sacred Hittite text to hear that "The mind of the gods is the same as when a servant stands before his master ... If the servant gives annoyance to his master, then one kills him, one mutilates his nose, his eyes, his ears ... Then one disgraces him in public and one takes no account of him."\(^{69}\) How alien would these sentiments have seemed to Homer's Zeus and Athene?

Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: http://www.casa-kvs.org.za/acta_classica.htm