Timeline of early Greek history
—All dates are B.C. and are approximate
—See also the map at Buxton pp. 12–13

7000–3000 B.C.: The **Neolithic Age** (or "new Stone" Age) in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. This is the era before the Greeks arrive. The mainland of Greece is inhabited by non-Greek-speaking peoples. The mainland probably had trade-and-cultural links to the Aegean islands, particularly the island of Crete.

3000–1200 B.C.: The **Bronze Age**

3000 B.C., the alloy bronze (= copper and tin) begins to be manufactured for use in tools, weapons, ornaments, etc., in the Near East and east Mediterranean. The land of Greece is as yet inhabited by non-Greek indigenous peoples.

2100 B.C.: Arrival of the earliest Greek-speakers into Greece. Probably they invade overland from the north. The Greeks' arrival is part of a much larger proliferation of Indo-European-speaking migrants or invaders across Eurasia. The Indo-Europeans originated probably on the steppes of southern Russia and began migrating before 4000 B.C.

1900–1490: **Minoan Civilization** on the island of Crete
—The Minoans are not Greeks, but their cultured, technologically advanced society will provide a model for the early Greeks to copy.

1600–1200: **Mycenaean Civilization** in mainland Greece
—The Mycenaeans are the earliest Greek civilization. They speak Greek and worship Greek gods. Do they also have <u>myths</u> of their gods? We cannot know for sure.

1220: The real **Trojan War**?
—In what is now northwestern Turkey, modern archaeology has revealed a fortified city, destroyed by fire sometime 1250–1200 B.C. Was this the real-life city of Troy, captured and burned by the Mycenaean Greeks, as commemorated distortedly in myth? We cannot know who destroyed the city, but speculation is tantalizing.

1200–1150: Downfall of the Mycenaean Civilization. Destruction of all the Mycenaean cities, in close succession.

1200–750: The "Dark Age" of Greece
—Modern archaeology reveals signs of widespread destruction and economic depression, as compared with the foregoing Mycenaean era. The Greeks survive as a people, but in greatly reduced material circumstances.
—At this point in history, until about 800 B.C., the Greeks lack any knowledge of writing.
—A new technology: The metal iron begins to be used in Greece by around 1050 B.C. See below.

—Gradual revival of Greek culture and trade, 900–750 B.C.

1100–500: Greek oral storytelling tradition under the bards (Greek *aoidoi*, "song singers," or *rhapsoidoi*, "song stitchers"). The bards maintain a Greek national "poetry" of unwritten traditional stories, memorized and repeated in performance.

1100–700: The birth of Greek mythology? The bards commemorate the vanished Mycenaeans as a race of superhuman heroes (Greek *hērōes*, "protectors"), beloved of the gods.

1050–750 B.C.: The early **Iron Age** in Greece. The metal iron now sees widespread use for certain tools, such as axes, swords, plowshares, and arrowheads. Ironworking has arrived in Greece from the east, perhaps ultimately from Armenia.

Iron as a novelty will be distortedly remembered in Greek mythology. In Greek myth, iron will be associated with innovation, violence, and the aftermath of the Heroic Age.

800: Creation of the Greek alphabet, copied from the Phoenician alphabet
—The Greek myths will begin to get written down.
—By about 600 B.C., Greece will see widespread literacy, with the upper and middle social classes able to read and write.

750: The poet **Homer** composes the epic poems *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*
—See Buxton pp. 31–35
—Together totalling about 27,800 lines of verse, the two poems detail certain episodes of the mythical Trojan War and aftermath. The name *Iliad* means "Story of Troy"; the name *Odyssey* means "Story of Odysseus". The two poems are the earliest surviving items of Western literature, and their influence on subsequent Western thought and literature has been immense.
—The *Iliad* does not recount the whole Trojan War story, but rather some dramatic events from the war's last year, prior to the fall of Troy, centering on the Greek hero Achilles.
—According to tradition, Homer was a blind bard, perhaps at the Greek island of Chios, near the Asia Minor coast.
—Probably (although we can never know for sure) Homer was illiterate; he created his poetry through the age-old process of oral composition; and he dictated his verses to scribes who wrote them down.

700: The poet Hesiod composes the poems *Theogony* and *Works and Days*
—See Buxton pp. 33 bottom to 34, 44–48
—According to his autobiographical comments in his work, Hesiod lived in the central-mainland Greek region of Boeotia or Boiotia [pronounced as *bee-O-sha*] and was a (rather grumpy) middle-class farmer. Probably he composed his poetry by writing it.
—Hesiod's *Theogony* (meaning "Birth of the Gods") is an important source of Greek myths about the beginning of the world.
—His *Works and Days* (that title = an exact translation of the Greek title) is a glorified farming calendar, with some added mythology, social comment, and ethical musings: quirky and of great interest.

"Minoans" versus "Mycenaeans": two different Bronze Age civilizations of the Aegean

See Buxton pp. 194–199 on archaeologist Arthur Evans and the Minoans. See pp. 9, 130, and 202 on archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann and Mycenae.

Student's question: *"In real-life ancient Greek history, who were the Minoans and the Mycenaeans? What's the difference between them? They both have such clunky names."*

Answer: Both were accomplished civilizations of the Aegean Sea region during the Bronze Age (3000–1200 BC), and it's too bad they have similar names. For our course of study, the Mycenaeans were the more important group. Unfortunately, our textbook does not much discuss them.

The Minoans were based on the Aegean island of Crete. The Mycenaeans were based in mainland Greece. The Minoans were NOT Greeks. The Mycenaeans WERE Greeks.

Although the two peoples were not ethnically related, the Minoans were cultural forerunners of the Mycenaeans: They strongly influenced the Mycenaeans by supplying a model-civilization for the Mycenaeans to copy.

● The **Minoans** flourished around 1900–1490 B.C., after emerging apparently in imitation of the Egyptian Old Kingdom. As said, they were based on Crete, with a capital city at Knossos [or Cnossus], and with colonies and trading-outlets elsewhere in the Aegean. Presumably the seafaring Minoans had regular contact with the mainland region that would someday be called Greece.

The Minoans' language, religion, and social structures were not Greek. For our study, their importance lies in the many ways in which they influenced and inspired the nascent Greek civilization (= the Mycenaean civilization) of the mainland, in areas such as socio-economic organization, seafaring, architecture, the use of writing, other technologies, and religion.

Secondarily, the Minoans would be remembered, distortedly, a thousand and more years after their downfall, in certain of the Greek myths, including myths of the powerful **King Minos** of Crete, with his monstrous stepson, the Minotaur, and their antagonist, the young Athenian hero **Theseus**.

Actually the Minoans are named for King Minos of myth. The name "Minoan" was invented by a modern archaeologist, Arthur Evans; he coined the term in 1900 A.D. to describe the grand civilization whose remnants he was excavating at Knossos. "Minoan" is just the adjectival form of "Minos". Evans's choice of name declared his (reasonable) assumption that this vanished civilization had been commemorated in Greek mythology.

● Again, the **Mycenaeans** were Greeks, early versions of the Greeks. They spoke Greek and worshipped Greek gods—as we know from their surviving writings (discovered by archaeology), which modern scholars have deciphered. Flourishing as a warlike civilization around 1600–1200 B.C., they represent the first blossoming of the Greeks, a thousand years before Pericles or Alexander the Great.

You can remember that "the Myc**e**na**e**ans were Gr**ee**ks" if you imagine the two letters E of "Greek" and the two letters E of "Mycenaean". Also, please note the "—aean" ending of the name "Mycenaean".

Similarly, you can remember that the Minoans were <u>not</u> Greeks if you can picture the name "Mi–NO–ans" with its embedded word "no".

Like the Minoans, the Mycenaeans got their name from modern archaeology. The term "Mycenaean" was coined in 1876 A.D. by archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann to describe the civilization whose huge fortifications he was uncovering at the site of the Bronze Age city of Mycenae (Greek *Mukēnai*) in southern Greece. The name "Mycenaean" is an adjectival form of "Mycenae".

Schliemann excavated also at the site of ancient Troy (Buxton pp. 200–205), but that is a different topic.

One question we will address is whether, and to what extent, the Minoan religion might have shaped the specific gods and goddesses of the Greeks.

In about 1490 B.C., the Mycenaeans snuffed out the Minoan Civilization by invading Crete and occupying it: The Mycenaeans thus supplanted the Minoans as the dominant force in the Aegean.

However, the Mycenaeans' heyday did not last long: They crashed to ruin at the violent end of the Bronze Age, around 1200–1100 B.C.

Some initial definitions

archaeology: the systematic study of the past through discovery and interpretation of material remains.

Mesopotamia: what is now Iraq, encompassing the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. A seedbed of early civilization, ancient Mesopotamia hosted the Bronze Age cultures of Sumer and Akkad (= Babylon), starting around 3000 B.C. These people were not Greek, but their many inventions and innovations would eventually reach the Greek world and elsewhere. A somewhat later Mesopotamian culture was Assyria. The name Mesopotamia ("[the land] between the rivers") happens to come from the ancient Greek language.

bronze: a metal, specifically an alloy of copper and tin at about a 9:1 ratio. Bronze is hard but will melt to liquid at the relatively low temperature of 950 degrees C, which ancient charcoal furnaces could attain. Molten bronze can be poured into a mould or cast, to cool to hardness in that shape. Thus, molten bronze can be intricately shaped, or be spread flat into sheets to produce armour or panelling, etc.

In terms of product, bronze marked a huge advance over humans' prior use of stone or copper for tools. Copper itself is too soft for wide use in tools, but after you add tin to molten copper, the resultant bronze (once cooled) is much harder than the copper alone would be.

Also, bronze working = a clear sign of long-range trade, in order to acquire the needed copper and tin.

Copper was found in the eastern Mediterranean, including parts of the Greek world. Tin, however, was not found in the eastern Mediterranean and had to be imported from far away—which required that the buyer have the wealth and organization to participate in a long-range trade network. Tin travelled to Greece from mines in what are now England, Spain, Iran, and Afghanistan.

The historian's terms **Stone Age**, **Neolithic Age**, **Bronze Age**, and **Iron Age**

See also the "Timeline of early Greek History" posted on Brightspace.

These modern labels refer to the remnants of ancient tools: That is, they refer to the most distinctive material left behind by humans in those eras. From the Stone Age, we find hammer heads and axe heads (etc.) made from worked stone—perhaps granite for the hammer, sharpened flint or obsidian for the axe. Later, a hammer head and axe head would be made of **bronze**. Later yet, they would be made of **iron**, a different metal. Each material—stone, bronze, iron—denotes a different stage of technology, a different era.

Thus the "stone" of the Stone Age refers to human-worked tools, not to stones in the ground.

The **Stone Age** encompasses not just Greece but all Europe and the Near East. The era begins early in prehistory and extends to around 3000 B.C.

The last stage of the Stone Age is called the **Neolithic Age**, covering 7000–3000 B.C. The word "Neolithic" is a science-word taken from ancient Greek, meaning "New Stone" [Age]—that is, the late Stone Age.

The Neolithic stage is when humans really started to organize, with the invention and spread of agriculture, permanent settlements, pottery, the loom, the wheel, and the plow. During the 5000s B.C. the skill of metallurgy emerged, with copper (a metal) being melted and shaped to make beads and certain tools.

Neolithic archaeological sites in modern Greece and Turkey have yielded so-called "goddess" figurines: small, fired-clay, human statuettes, predominantly (but not all) of females, many showing exaggerated renderings of the breasts, buttocks, and genitalia. The statuettes' exact meanings or uses are unclear to us, but they may have involved a reverence for female fertility and generative power. Thus they *may* perhaps betoken some kind of early religious worship, possibly of goddesses or of a female principle. See the "Prehistoric Aegean mother goddess" posting on Brightspace.

The **Bronze Age**: 3000–1200 B.C. Now the most distinctive human-made material left behind is bronze, in tools and weapons.

The Bronze Age saw further organization and centralization across the Near East and eastern Mediterranean. There emerged in sequence five major civilizations, based partly on bronze technology—

- the Sumerians and Akkadians of Mesopotamia
- the Egyptian Old Kingdom
- the **Minoan Civilization** on the island of **Crete**: See Buxton pp. 16–17, 194, 198, and see the "Minoan Civilization images" document posted on Brightspace
- the Hittite kingdom of Asia Minor
- the **Mycenaean Civilization** based in mainland Greece. See Buxton page 16, and see the Brightspace postings "Minoans and Mycenaeans" and "Mycenaean Civilization images"

The Mycenaeans were Greeks, the first blossoming of the Greeks. The Minoans, however, were <u>not</u> Greek; yet their civilization was destined to strongly influence Greek culture and religion.

The Bronze Age was the era of grand kingdoms because you had to be rich in order to succeed: Only powerful kings—such as in Egypt or at Babylon or Mycenae—could provide the organizational structure and wealth needed to purchase tin (also copper) through long-range trade.

The next era, beginning in Greece around 1050 B.C., would be the **Iron Age**. In this era, the metal iron made its first appearance, becoming thus the most distinctive human remnant.

Interestingly, in Greek mythology, the Iron Age would be remembered as a time of innovation, violence, and social breakdown, in the aftermath of the glorious Age of Heroes. To be discussed in class.

Our textbook is *The Complete World of Greek Mythology by* Richard Buxton, here called "Buxton".

The contextual approach
In this course, we will study not just the narratives of the myths but also certain facts of about real-life ancient Greece—religion, geography, politics, social mores, etc.—that are relevant to the myths and that shed light on certain myths' meanings or even their origins. This "real-life background" approach is called "contextual".

Sept. 10 class focused on two real-life aspects of ancient Greece:
1) its geography
2) its earliest history

● The land of Greece
In Buxton, see pp. 178–193. See the two maps at pp. 12–13.

The traditional land of Greece (corresponding roughly to the modern nation) is a jagged, mountainous, irregular peninsula, sticking southward into the northeastern Mediterranean Sea. The coastline, with its zigzag indentations, reaches 2,000 miles in length. The mountains, an extension of the Balkan Mountains of Serbia and Bulgaria, run generally northwest-to-southeast and continue southeastward under water, to constitute the Greek islands of the **Aegean Sea**: The islands are mountaintops. These islands provide "stepping stones" across the sea, south to the large island of **Crete** and southeast and east to the coast of **Asia Minor** (modern Turkey). For much of real-life Greek history, Crete and western Asia Minor were inhabited by Greeks.

The Aegean Sea, lying east of mainland Greece, is just a sector of the Mediterranean. Supposedly the Aegean was named for the mythical Athenian king **Aegeus** [or Aigeus], father the hero **Theseus**. According to one tale, Aegeus committed suicide by leaping into the sea. (But see Buxton page 128 for a different version: that Aegeus leapt from the Athenian acropolis, which is not near the sea.)

The part of the Mediterranean that borders Greece on the west is usually called the Ionian Sea. The strait running northwest from that is called the Adriatic Sea.

With its limited arable land but immensely long coastline, Greece from earliest times called people to **seafaring**. Commercial fishing, seaborne trade, piracy, mass emigration on ships (for population control), and naval warfare: All would loom large in Greek history and society. Seafaring would be a vital Greek skill: The ancient Greeks—after copycatting the Phoenicians of Lebanon, circa 900–700 B.C.—would become the best seafarers of the ancient world.

See Buxton pp. 192–193 for some mythology-angled comments on the sea. The god of the sea was the powerful and sometimes-brutal **Poseidon**, brother of the great god **Zeus**. In real-life ancient Greece, a traveller about to make a sea voyage might pray to Poseidon and offer him a generous animal-sacrifice or money-donation, to try to avoid shipwreck.

Other deities too were believed to protect seafarers: for example (a) **Athena** [or Athene], (b) **Aphrodite**, and (c) the divine twins **Castor** and **Polydeuces** [or Kastor and Polydeukes].

Long-range seafaring plays a role in Greek myth—for example (as students in class commented) the tales of **Jason** and the Argonauts and of the wanderings of **Odysseus**.

The southernmost part of mainland Greece looks like a jagged triangle or diamond, with three little peninsulas at the bottom, sticking southward. This region is called the **Peloponnese** or Peloponnesus (meaning "island of Pelops"). **Pelops** was a mythical hero: Buxton pp. 148–150. The Peloponnese was the heart of Bronze Age Greece and is very relevant to Greek mythology.

Greece's **mountainous terrain** had several important effects on its real-life history. For one, the mountains reduce the amount of good farmland to only about 20 percent of the total area—concentrated mainly in about four fertile plains—with another 10 percent of adequate hillside farmland. Thus, in real-life ancient Greece, only a limited number of spots could support a large settlement or city, and even these spots might invite war between two neighbouring cities over full possession of the farmland.

The foremost cities of ancient Greece were those that could dominate a local farming plain, by subduing or ejecting any rival-cities near the plain.

The mountain slopes in ancient times held forests of oak, beech, fir, and pine, with many uninhabited and uncultivated areas. In Greek religion, these untamed mountains were considered to be the haunt of supernatural beings. The home of the 12 major gods was the massive **Mt. Olympus** [Olympos], in the northeast. And individual gods—like **Apollo**, **Artemis**, Aphrodite, **Dionysus** [or Dionysos], and **Hermes**—were associated with certain individual Greek mountains. Zeus, king of the gods and lord of the sky, could be associated with any mountain-top. Buxton pp. 51, 59, and 180–183.

Also the Greeks believed in some lesser deities—such as the god **Pan** or the demigoddesses called **nymphs** (*numphai*)—who were associated with the wilderness places of all the mountains. Buxton pp. 184–185. Buxton chooses to capitalize the word's letter N (so "Nymphs"), but students may use either styling.

Greece's bedrock tends to **limestone**. Geologically, in mountains anywhere, the bedrock can show up near the surface. In some places, limestone has evolved geologically to its compressed form: **marble**. In ancient Greece, limestone and marble were quarried from hillsides and mountains, to provide a superb building- material. Marble—easily shaped by carving and which can take a beautiful polish—is used also for sculpture.

Limestone is relatively soft and porous. In the natural world, one effect of limestone is the existence of **caves** (often associated with running water that has carved-out the cave over time). Caves played a substantial role in ancient Greek religion and mythology. Caves were thought to offer an intimate approach to the earth goddess, **Gaia**. Caves were considered sacred to the nymphs. Supposedly, Zeus was born and grew to manhood (in one year) in a cave on the island of Crete. The gods Dionysus,

Hermes, and **Pan** also had connections to caves. And at the southern tip of the Peloponnese, a network of caves was believed to be an actual entrance to the **Underworld**. Buxton pp. 47–48, 184–187 and 199.

Another effect of limestone is loss of rainwater in the mountains. Limestone is porous, allowing rainwater to descend vertically from the surface—perhaps to be captured in underground aquifers, perhaps not. For this reason, rain and springtime thaw in the Greek mountains do not produce large water run-offs, and for *this* reason, **lakes and rivers are scarce in Greece**, and the lakes and rivers are small. Obviously this reduced one important potential water-source, adding pressure on humans for survival.

Furthermore, much of Greece receives **not much rain**. Greek summers are ferociously hot and dry, and the country's eastern half has a special problem: During the winter's rains, the central mountains block the rain-weather normally coming from the west; the rainclouds tend to empty on Greece's western side. **Athens**, in the east, sees only about 15 inches of rain a year. (By contrast, Ottawa typically gets around 45 inches.)

In a country so dry, sources of **fresh water** were considered nearly holy and had religious-mythological associations: See Buxton pp. 188–191 on the gods of rivers and the nymphs of springs.

Rain in Greece comes mainly in winter. The mountains receive snow, but on the plains the Greek winter resembles a rainy mid April in Ottawa: The weather is chilly for humans but nutritive for crops. Then summer arrives, parching the land. Summer, not winter, is the barren season in Greece.

The main farm **crops** of ancient Greece were barley, wheat, grapes, olives, beans, peas, and tree-fruit including pear, fig, and pomegranate. Except for barley and wheat, all these crops could survive a Greek summer. (Barley and wheat avoided the summer: See below.)

Barley and wheat are two different types of **grain**. Barley—less tasty than wheat but easier to grow—was favoured by ancient Greek farmers.

The essential trio of grain, olives, and grapes is known to modern scholars as the **Mediterranean Triad**. Grapes and olives grow through the summer and are harvested in October–November. As well as for food, grapes went into making **wine**, and olives into **olive oil**: two prime sales products in ancient Greece. Olive oil, for example, had uses as lamp fuel, cooking oil, and body soap, and was a high-end export item produced by the city of Athens.

For grain farming, the seeds were planted in October, to germinate through the winter and be harvested in May–June. (Contrast this with Canada's grain seeding in April–May and harvest in September.)

The vital produce-Triad was linked to certain gods. Olives were supposedly a gift from the goddess Athena. Grapes and wine were the realm of the god **Dionysus** [Dionysos]. The motherly **Demeter** and her daughter, **Persephone**, were the goddesses of the grain harvest and of agriculture generally. See the chart at Buxton page 69.

Demeter was especially beloved by ancient Greek common folk as being the source of food. People would name their children after her. Demeter's name, in adjectival form, became the real-life boys' name "Demetrius" [or Demetrios].

Today Demetrius is popular Greek male name, and the prevalent modern Slavic name Dmitri (in various forms) derives from the Greek.

See Buxton page 63 on the mythical hero **Triptolemus** [Triptolemos], to whom the goddess Demeter taught the skill of agriculture, so that he in turn might teach it to humankind. In Greek mythology, a hero (1) might not inevitably be a warrior but rather (2) might be the inventor of certain civilizing skills. Other examples of purely civilizing heroes are Asclepius [Asklepios] and Orpheus, who were a doctor and musician, respectively.

A footnote on "corn": You'll find the word "corn" in our textbook at pp. 63, 69, 72, 73, and elsewhere, usually in reference to the goddess Demeter. However, please understand that the textbook, written by an Englishman, uses the word "corn" in the British sense, to mean "grain".

The ancient Greeks had no maize, no corn on the cob. Corn on the cob was introduced to Europeans by North American First Nations in the 1500s A.D. But our word "corn" is much older than the 1500s: Originally it meant any kind of edible grain, such as wheat. Today in Britain, the word "corn" can still mean wheat or oats, etc.—which is how the textbook uses it.

For help on the farm and for food, the Greeks had domesticated animals, including the sheep, goat, pig, and chicken. Every farm kept at least two oxen (castrated bulls) to pull the plow, and richer farmers with access to wide pasturage might keep herds of cattle, as well.

Not by coincidence, the above-mentioned farm animals were also the prime choices for **animal sacrifice** in Greek religious practice. We will discuss, further into the course.

● The earliest Greek history: around 2100–1600 B.C.

Regarding the modern terms **Stone Age**, **Neolithic Age**, **Bronze Age**, and **Iron Age**, see the separate "Stone Age and Bronze Age" posting on Brightspace.

See also two postings on Brightspace: "An Aegean mother goddess" and "Images from the Minoan Civilization".

The "first Greeks": circa 2100 B.C. What Indo-European studies tell us

The opening scene here is mainland Greece, but before the first Greeks arrive. Greece is inhabited by non-Greek-speaking "aboriginals" who are a farming people. Their other skills include stone masonry and seafaring. They are not Indo-European speakers (see below). Their culture is centered in southern Greece, in the Peloponnese, chiefly on the **plain of Argos**.

Probably around 2100 B.C., a different people begin invading or infiltrating this land: They are migrants who speak an early form of the Greek language. The newcomers can be called **the first Greeks**.

Eventually, they subdue, and probably intermarry with, the non-Greek people already there. Archaeologically, it does not look like the invaders massacre the conquered people. Rather, they integrate, amalgamate.

In future Greek mythology, a distant memory of intermarriage might perhaps lurk in myths where the Greek hero **marries the foreign princess**: Perseus and Andromeda, Jason and Medea, Theseus and Phaedra (and Ariadne), etc.

Like other migrant peoples of history, these first-arriving Greeks of 2100 B.C. have left behind virtually no durable remains—no pottery or carved stone to help tell us what they were like.

However, we get surprising help from the realm of language studies, specifically **Indo-European language studies**. Through cautious examination of ancient and modern Indo-European languages, we receive hints about the early Greeks' society and religion.

"Indo-European" is a word from modern scholarship. Today, some 59 major modern languages represent the Indo-European family, which stretches (in terms of language-homelands) from Ireland eastward to India. Modern Indo-European languages include English, German, Danish, Gaelic, modern and ancient Greek, Armenian, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Farsi, Pashto, Russian, Polish, Czech, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Serbo-Croatian, and the Romance languages (French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Romanian). Today half the population of Earth speaks one or another Indo-European tongue as a first language.

Among the major languages not belonging to the Indo-European family are Arabic, Turkish, Mandarin and other languages of the Pacific Rim, and indigenous languages of Africa.

As astonishing as it seems, modern Hindi (in India) is distantly related to English and to Irish Gaelic; and all three are related to Farsi (in Iran) and to Russian. All Indo-European languages are related to each other as "cousins": All derive from one, self-same, prehistoric proto-language and culture, which (some scholars believe) dwelt on the southern Russian steppes around 4500 B.C.

How did this family of related languages come to be spread across Eurasia? Sometime around 4200 B.C., the prehistoric Indo-European people—or at least their language—began radiating outward, east and west, across Eurasia, eventually occupying most of Europe and much of Central Asia and India, as well as the Iranian plateau.

The simplest explanation for this spread lies in mass migration and invasion: The Indo-European tribes probably invaded, overland, those other regions. The contingent that entered Greece represent just one branch of a much larger, amazing phenomenon.

As the Indo-European tribes diverged in their migrations, the language spoken by each tribe would in time evolve away from its mother tongue. Eventually, the tribes would not easily have understood each other, had they met. One language among the many would become what we call "ancient Greek".

Modern Indo-European studies look first at the three earliest Indo-European languages to be preserved in quantity in writing: the ancient tongues of **Greek**, **Latin**, and **Sanskrit**. Latin was spoken by the ancient Romans of Italy. Sanskrit can be thought of as "the Latin of India".

Sanskrit shows surprisingly strong similarities to Greek and Latin. For example, the word for "father" is *patēr* in ancient Greek, *pater* in Latin, and *pitar* in Sanskrit. Also, all three words are related linguistically to our English word "father".

Next, Indo-European studies look at all other Indo-European languages, past and present, to see what further facts can be learned. Across the languages, what seem to be the oldest shared words relating to social organization, religion, technology, etc.?

For example, every single Indo-European language contains a form of the word-root *wegh*, meaning "to convey in a wheeled vehicle". This tells us that the earliest Indo-Europeans, prior to 4000 B.C., were using the **wheel**. Relevant modern *wegh* words include our English "wagon" and French "véhicule".

From such background, we are able to piece together some tentative facts about the Indo-Europeans of 4200–2000 B.C., including the branch that would eventually invade Greece—

The early Indo-Europeans did **not** invent the wheel (which seems to have been invented around 4500 B.C. in Mesopotamia). However, the Indo-Europeans had domesticated the horse and probably they invented the lightweight, horse-drawn **chariot** design: two wheels, two or four horses, and a small box of wood or wickerwork to hold two riders, at most. The chariot would have revolutionized land travel for speed and "all terrain" access, and probably helps explain the spectacular success of the Indo-European invasions.

Some of the people whom the Indo-Europeans encountered would not yet have domesticated the horse. We know from archaeology, for example, that the land of Greece had no domesticated horses until the Indo-Europeans arrived.

What else we can guess about the early Indo-Europeans, from language studies—

They had a patriarchal society, ascending to a king or chief. Their religion was **polytheistic** (worshipping multiple gods). Their pantheon ascended to a male king of the gods who was a **sky god** or "sky father": He wasn't a sun god but was manifested in the daytime sky and the rain sky and the thunderbolt, etc. His name is preserved in the Indo-European word-root *dyeu*, "shining" or "Bright One".

This Indo-European root *dyeu* is the origin of the name of **Zeus**, the Greeks' king of the gods and lord of the thunderbolt.

The same Indo-European *dyeu* root provides the name of the Roman god Jupiter (originally *Dyu-piter*, "Bright Father") and in India the pre-Hindu god *Dyaus Pitar* (again, "Bright Father"). Also, this same god's name and attributes show up in the ancient Germanic thunder-god Tiu (or Tyr or Thor).

The *dyeu* root appears also in words like ancient Latin *deus*, "god", *divus*, "divine", and *dies*, "day"; and in ancient Sanskrit *deva*, "spirit, demon". The modern French word *dieu* derives from Latin *deus*. By a charming coincidence, French *dieu* exactly duplicates, in its sound, the original Indo-European ancestor-word *dyeu*.

Eventually, before 1600 B.C., the aboriginal people of Greece disappear as a separate identity, subsumed into the society of the conquering Greek speakers. As said, almost certainly the aboriginals' disappearance involved intermarriage and cultural fusion with the invaders—not extermination.

Although the Greek language won out, the conquered people probably contributed greatly to the eventual identity of the ancient Greeks—in terms of technology, culture, and religion.

Further, a second Bronze Age influence on the early Greeks would have been the non-Greek **Minoan Civilization** on Crete, 1900–1490 B.C. See the Brightspace posting titled "Images from the Minoan Civilization".

Early on, in the 1400s B.C., the Greeks copycatted the Minoans to acquire certain desirable technologies, such as palace-building and the skill of writing. Probably they copied in religious matters, too.

One originally-non-Greek facet that would go into Greek religion would be the worship of certain protective **goddesses**. Probably this facet goes back to the non-Greek, Neolithic, eastern Mediterranean worship of a mother goddess.

In classical Greek religion, the goddesses **Hera**, **Athena**, **Artemis**, and **Persephone** all seem historically to have been pre-Greek in origin. Circa 2100–1600 B.C., these goddesses may have been worshipped by the Minoans of Crete and/or by the non-Greek aboriginal people of mainland Greece. The newcomer Indo-Europeans adopted these goddesses into a Greek religion that was still evolving.

By 1600 B.C., the two peoples of mainland Greece (that is, the Indo-Europeans and the conquered aboriginals) had fused into one people. Together, they now emerge into history as the grand and warlike **Mycenaean Civilization**—the first blossoming of the Greeks.

Sept. 17 lecture topics
- The Minoan Civilization of Crete: 1900–1490 B.C.
- The Mycenaean Civilization of Greece: 1600–1200 B.C.
- The Greek "Dark Age": 1200–750 B.C.
- Oral storytelling in an illiterate society: 1100–700 B.C.
  —The birth of Greek mythology?

See the map at Buxton pp. 12–13.

See on Brightspace these posted documents: “A prehistoric Aegean mother goddess”, “Timeline of early Greek history”, “The labels ‘Stone Age’ and ‘Bronze Age’”, “Minoans and Mycenaeans”, “Images from the Minoan Civilization”, and “Images from the Mycenaean Civilization”.

See also the Sept. 10 posted lecture notes.

The Minoan Civilization of the island of Crete: 1900–1490 B.C.
See Buxton pp. 16, 127, and 194–199.

The Minoans were not Greeks but are important to early Greek history as serving as a model that was copycatted by the early Greeks: The Minoan Civilization of circa 1500 B.C. became a model for the more-warlike Mycenaean society.

In that process, the worship of the Minoan mother goddesses—or at least the worship of certain individual Minoan goddesses—became a permanent part of Greek religion.

The Minoan Civilization is remembered distortedly in Greek myth—for example in the tale of **Theseus** and Minotaur. We will discuss in a future class.

The Mycenaean Civilization of mainland Greece: 1600–1200 B.C.
The Mycenaeans were the earliest ancient Greek civilization, the first blossoming of the Greeks, a thousand years before Plato or Alexander the Great, etc.

Our Buxton textbook unfortunately omits almost any reference to the Mycenaeans: just photo captions at pp. 9 and 16. But your prof believes that we cannot really understand Greek mythology without understanding the fact of there having been a Mycenaean Civilization. We need to see that there was this “first version” of the Greek civilization, which emerged vigorously and then sank away during the Bronze Age, at the start of Greek history.

Oversimplifying somewhat, we can say that the Mycenaeans would eventually turn into the imagined **heroes** of Greek mythology: Perseus, Jason, Theseus, Odysseus, etc. Explained further below, on pp. 4–5.

In 1876 A.D., wealthy retired German businessman and amateur archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann began excavating at the site of **Mycenae** (Greek *Mukēnai*) in the **Peloponnese** in southern mainland Greece. Our textbook mentions Schliemann at pp. 130 and 202, in regard to his digging at ancient Troy, only. After Troy, he dug at Mycenae.

Schliemann was a life-long admirer of the ancient Greek poet Homer’s poems *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Schliemann wanted to prove that the poems were based on fact and that Mycenae could have supported Homer’s mythical image of a powerful **King Agamemnon** whose seat was Mycenae. Although we today would say that Schliemann failed to prove that Agamemnon had actually existed, what Schliemann did prove was that Mycenae had been the site of a rich, powerful Bronze Age kingdom: He found tombs filled

with treasure, and massive walls of huge limestone blocks, fitted without mortar, all dating back to about 1600–1200 B.C. Schliemann named this society "Mycenaean" based on his findings at Mycenae.

Thus the clunky name "Mycenaean", which is just an adjectival form of the city-name "Mycenae".

Modern scholars believe that the civilization may have contained up to 20 separate, small kingdoms, each ruled by its own king. The major sites are listed below. All were inside mainland Greece.

Confusingly, the word "Mycenaean" in modern discussion could mean two different things at once: (a) relating just to the city Mycenae or (b) relating to this entire Bronze Age Greek culture. Usually in CLA2323, we'll use the word to mean (b). When we say that Pylos was one of the Mycenaean cities, we mean that Pylos was a city within this larger early-Greek civilization. We don't mean that Pylos was inhabited by people from Mycenae-city or that Pylos was taking orders from Mycenae.

● They were Greeks

Studies in the 140 years since Schliemann have proved that the Mycenaeans were Greeks: They spoke Greek, as revealed by their extant **writings** (which we have deciphered).

The Mycenaean writing system is known by the modern name **Linear B**. Preserved on clay tablets, the writings include lists of the Mycenaean gods. These tell us that by 1400–1200 B.C. the Mycenaeans were worshipping gods who were much the same group as would be the gods of classical Greece, a thousand years later: Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, Athena, etc.

● The Mycenaean kingdoms

By about 1300 B.C., the main Mycenaean sites had evolved into small cities that were basically [a palace + a town + a strong encircling wall], a bit like medieval castles. Outside the city walls was the kingdom's countryside, including villages and (typically) a farming plain that produced the kingdom's food.

Today, archaeologists are aware of more than 15 Mycenaean sites throughout mainland Greece. However, four sites seem to have been preeminent. Each of these sites controlled one of the major farming plains of Greece. And not by coincidence, each of these cities would also later be **prominent in Greek mythology**.

(a) in southern Greece, in the northeast-central Peloponnese, on the plain of Argos: the united cities of **Mycenae**, **Tiryns**, and **Argos**, ruled from out of Mycenae. Mycenae was evidently the richest and most powerful of all Greek cities of this era. In Greek myth, Mycenae would be associated with heroes like **Pelops**, **Perseus**, and Agamemnon.

(b) in the southwestern Peloponnese: the city **Pylos**, on the plain of Messenia. In Homer's poems, the old king **Nestor** would be recalled as Pylos' mythical ruler.

(c) in the central Greece, on the plain of Boeotia [or Boiotia, but pronounced as *bee-O-sha* regardless]: the city of **Thebes**. Among Thebes' mythical heroes would be **Oedipus** and the mighty **Heracles** [Herakles].

(d) in northeastern Greece, on the plain of Thessaly: the city of **Iolcus** [Iolkos]. In myth, **Jason** and the **Argonauts** would sail from Iolcus in quest of the golden fleece. The warrior **Achilles** would come from that general area.

Athens and **Corinth** appear to have been of only secondary importance in Mycenaean times. We can add them as being the 5th and 6th locales commemorated in well known myths. Athens' only important hero would be Theseus. Corinth would claim several heroes, including the trickster **Sisyphus** [Sisyphos] and his grandson **Bellerophon**.

Thus we can see that the important cities in Greek mythology are those that were important during Mycenaean Civilization of 1600–1200 B.C.; they're not necessarily the important cities of later Greek history. During the 400s B.C., for example, the two most powerful Greek cities were Athens and Sparta. But neither Athens nor Sparta plays a major role as a setting in Greek myth. Instead, Mycenae and Thebes grab most of the glory in the mythology. That's because Mycenae and Thebes were major Mycenaean-era sites.

● Mycenaean religion

As mentioned, modern archaeology tells us that Mycenaean religion was recognizably similar to the classical Greek religion of the 400s B.C., a thousand years later. The Mycenaeans worshipped multiple gods, headed by the age-old Indo-European god-king, Zeus. The Mycenaean lists-of-gods include some deity-names that we cannot recognize, but the lists also include almost all the names of the future major deities of classical Greece.

Of the future 12 Olympian deities, only one name definitely is absent from the Mycenaean-era lists of 1400–1200 B.C.: the goddess **Aphrodit**e. She will enter Greek religion at a later date, as we'll discuss.

Footnote: The deities Apollo and Demeter may perhaps also be absent from the Mycenaean lists—or perhaps not.

Apollo in identity may be lurking behind a different name on the lists: *Paiawon*. That name seems clearly to be a form of the name "Paean", which in later centuries would be associated with Apollo.

Similarly, Demeter may possibly be identified with a goddess on the list who is named "Potnia" (Greek "lady" or "matron").

As well as a religion, did the Mycenaeans have a mythology? We do not know for sure. However, all Indo-European peoples seem to have developed some stories of their gods, and all Indo-Europeans seem also to have maintained a tradition of oral poetry celebrating the warlike deeds of their chiefs and of their chiefs' ancestors. So it looks likely that certain elements of a future Greek mythology were already in place in Mycenaean times, around 1300 B.C.

● The downfall of Mycenaean Civilization: 1200–1100 B.C.

As viewed by modern archaeology, the Mycenaeans disappear abruptly and violently soon after 1200 B.C. Nearly every Mycenaean centre is destroyed by fire at around the same time. From our viewpoint, it looks like a car hitting a wall at 100 kph. Around 1260 B.C. the Mycenaeans seem to have been

thriving; a century later their civilization was all but gone. Only the mighty cities of Mycenae and Tiryns held out, reduced gradually in repeated attacks, until about 1100 B.C. Only Athens (according to the evidence of archaeology) was never destroyed.

Modern theories point to two or three causes that could have occurred at once. From circa 1250 there may have been growing pressure on the Mycenaeans due to diminished trade imports, including the metal **tin**, essential for the making of **bronze**. The supply problem probably originated far outside of Greece, along eastern trade routes: Non-Greek kingdoms in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East were being threatened by raids and migrations of various (non-Greek) peoples, which tended to shut down long-range trade.

Dwindling supplies in Greece might have caused (a) uprisings against the Mycenaean kings and/or (b) wars between Mycenaean kingdoms, as they began fighting for remaining resources.

Later on, Greek mythology would describe a war between the cities Mycenae and Thebes: the **Seven against Thebes** myth. If that myth has any truth—and perhaps it may not—it could preserve a dim memory of a real-life war between the two cities in the late 1200s B.C.

Similarly, it may be that circa 1220 B.C. **a real-life Trojan War** was fought. Greek myth speaks of the famous Trojan War. Modern archaeology confirms that there was a real-life city of Troy that was not Greek-speaking and that was destroyed—by whom exactly we don't know—circa 1220 B.C.

Perhaps the Greek myth carries a kernel of fact. In real life, perhaps a Mycenaean army sailed to Asia Minor to eliminate the non-Greek city of Troy, so as to un-block Troy's monopoly on westward sea trade through the **Hellespont** channel. Later, myth would speak of a beautiful Helen of Troy who was the cause of the war, but maybe the real-life causes were economic. See Buxton pp. 200–205.

Regardless, to causes (a) and (b) as above we can add (c) a third cause: attack from outside. By 1200 B.C., the Mycenaean cities (after exhausting themselves by internal fighting?) probably were under attack by non-Greek groups who were raiders, like the Vikings of Europe's Middle Ages. Ancient Egyptian records refer to these raiders as the "Sea Peoples".

Anyway, the Mycenaean civilization crashed to ruin.

The Greek "Dark Age": 1200–750 B.C.

What happened after the Mycenaean fall? Modern archaeology reveals widespread destruction, depopulation, and economic depression. Yet the Greeks as a people survived in Greece, and some culture survived in the oral storytelling tradition of the bards.

See the "Timeline of early Greek history" posted on Brightspace. Note the entries concerning the bards, the alphabet, and the poet **Homer**.

Oral tradition in an illiterate society: 1100–700 B.C.

See Buxton pp. 8, 31–35

The skill of writing, possessed by the Mycenaeans, was lost in the Mycenaean downfall; Greece remained an illiterate society for about 400 years: from 1200 to 800 B.C. (After that, literacy was only gradually restored.) Still, in that era, poetry and storytelling did not die; rather, the opposite. Greek storytelling and mythology blossomed in the framework of an oral tradition.

Oral poetic tradition is not unique to Greek history and since the 19th century A.D. has been studied amid aboriginal cultures in the South Pacific, North America, and elsewhere. Very illuminating studies were done in 1930s Bosnia by a U.S. scholar named Milman Parry. The 1930s Bosnian illiterate tradition seemed to link back, over millennia, to a much older, Mediterranean, Indo-European oral tradition.

Oral societies typically include a class of professional poets or "bards" whose skill is to remember hundreds of traditional tales and to be able to deliver them in public recitations in a kind of chant or rhythmic sing-song, often with some simple musical accompaniment, and often in response to a spontaneous request from the audience: "Tell us the tale where XYZ". The tale might normally be one where everyone in the audience already knew the general story but where the poet supplied the details, the narrative suspense, and any morale at the end.

The sing-song format provides the speaker with a helpful memory device, as well as with a musically pleasing delivery. But (as modern studies confirm) no two recitations are exactly the same: Even the same poet, telling the same story two nights in a row, will deliver slightly different versions.

In Dark Age Greece, a professional guild of **bards** (Greek *aoidoi*, "singers of songs," or *rhapsoidoi*, "stitchers of songs") maintained a national culture of unwritten traditional stories. These tales or "myths" (Greek *muthoi*) told of the gods and of a now-vanished race of superhuman heroes (Greek *hērōes,* "protectors"), beloved of the gods.

Unlike the gods, the heroes were imagined as human: susceptible to injury and failure, and doomed to die in the end. Famous heroes of Greek myth include those mentioned at page 2 above and also, for example, Odysseus, Meleager, and (a female) Atalanta.

Often, but not always, a Greek hero was imagined as the son or grandson of a god: A male god had mated with a female human, producing an exceptional-but-human offspring.

● The birth of Greek mythology, circa 1100–800 B.C.?

Most world mythologies talk mainly about the culture's gods and goddesses: their origins and adventures. But Greek mythology is unusual, statistically. In the Greek myths that survive for us—some 200 major stories in all—the big majority of tales deal with heroes, not with god primarily. The ratio of hero-stories versus god-stories in Greek mythology is 5:1.

Why this preponderance in favour of the heroes? Where did it come from?

One purpose of all mythology is to explain the world to an audience in an era before science or writing. "Where did humans come from?" "Why is the sky blue?" "Why do we have to be poor?" "Why does that huge boulder stand all by itself on the plain outside town?"

One particular purpose of Greek mythology was to "explain" to its audiences about the prior, fallen civilization that we today would call Mycenaean.

In class, we tried to imagine the impoverished Greeks of 1050 B.C., living meagrely amid the wrecked fortifications at Tiryns or Mycenae or Thebes. Maybe the village chief, in his mud hut, safeguards a prized possession: a gold bracelet, handed down from his grandfather's grandfather, which somehow had survived the looting and chaos of the great city's destruction 150 years before.

"Who were these forerunners," the Greeks might wonder, while walking past the wrecked walls of Mycenae. "Why were they so rich, so powerful, so accomplished, so much better than we are? Obviously, they were beloved of the gods. And then what happened to them?"

Your prof's thesis: The hero-tales of Greek mythology began circa 1100 B.C. as an attempt to explain who the Mycenaeans had been. Heroes like Perseus and Achilles equate to the Dark Age's distorted view of the real-life Mycenaeans—who had built the mighty cities, conquered abroad, won treasure, and then had fallen. In an era with no writing, the bards' oral poetry literally mythologized the vanished Mycenaeans into a vanished race of heroes.

Clarification: We're not saying that there ever necessarily was a Mycenaean lord named Perseus whose true deeds got exaggerated over time. Rather, the mythical heroes as a group were used to explain (to Greek Dark Age audiences) the Mycenaeans as a group. Probably any one detail in any myth is untrue historically.

One example, never mentioned in our textbook: In real life, at Tiryns, during the centuries around 1100–200 B.C., the city's massive, old, Mycenaean perimeter wall—made of huge limestone blocks fitted together without mortar—remained partly standing, in remnants. Greek mythology explained that the walls had been raised by a work crew of Cyclopes (giant Cyclops creatures), whom the human king Proetus [Proitos] had employed. Thus for a Greek audience circa 1000 B.C. that knew nothing of engineering technology, the myth explained how such giant walls had been built.

So was there ever a real King Proetus? Almost certainly not. But behind Proetus' tale stands the reality of anonymous Mycenaean kings, engineers, and work crews at Tiryns, circa 1400–1300 B.C.

The Olympians
See the table at Buxton page 69. Here are the 12 Olympians—

Greek name	Roman name
Zeus	Jupiter
Hera	Juno
Poseidon	Neptunus [Neptune]
Aphrodite	Venus
Demeter	Ceres
Artemis	Diana
Apollo	Apollo
Athene [Athena]	Minerva
Ares	Mars
Hephaistos [Hephaestus]	Volcanus *or* Vulcanus [Vulcan]
Hermes	Mercurius [Mercury]
Dionysos [Dionysus]	Bacchus

In addition, the following are not counted as Olympians, in some cases because they are imagined as dwelling elsewhere than on Mt. Olympus [Olympos]:

Hades	Pluto
Persephone	Proserpina
Hestia	Vesta
Pan	Faunus
Priapos [Priapus]	Priapus
Eros	Cupido [Cupid]

You are **not** responsible for knowing the gods' Roman names. They're included here just for thoroughness's sake.

The "two compartments" of a Greek god
Brief comment by Buxton at pp. 69–70

In studying the mythology, you will observe that each Greek god/goddess generally comprises two "compartments". One compartment is the deity's place in the universe: his/her "sphere of activity" in the world, as listed at Buxton page 69.

The 2nd compartment is the god's personality, as though the god were a human being. And the personalities of certain Greek gods' can be sometimes problematic: A god who has the most elevated or worthwhile sphere of activity—for example, Zeus as lord of justice, Apollo as god of medicine and intellect, Athena as mistress of technology and planning—might also behave (in the mythology) in ways that are arrogant, petulant, childish, bullying, mean, etc.

The contrast is the most striking with Zeus or Apollo, who combine difficult personalities with elevated ethical spheres. (Apollo's personality seems actually unpleasant, overall.)

However, the contrast is less stark with a lesser god like Hephaestus, whose activity-sphere as god of metallurgy does not much contrast with his inoffensive and professional-minded personality.

The lesson is that generally, for any deity, the two compartments will not overlap or coincide: You cannot reconcile the god's sometimes-peevish personality his/her lofty role in the universe and as protector of certain human activity. So don't be puzzled or frustrated. Each god just = two parts.

The mythical origins of the gods

Main source: Hesiod's poem *Theogony* (Greek "Birth of the Gods"), from 700 B.C. See Buxton pp. 44–48

The best way to view the Olympian gods is as a "family business" where the business is running the universe. **Zeus** is head of the family and of the business: He is the authority figure and the **brother** or **father** of all other Olympians (father, too, to many demigods and heroes). Zeus' brothers are Poseidon and Hades. His wife and sister is Hera; their children include the Olympians Ares and Hephaestus. (Or maybe Hera conceived Hephaestus on her own, without Zeus' or anyone's help: See page 9, below.) Zeus' other sister is Demeter, by whom he has the daughter Persephone. His third sister is the virgin Hestia.

Zeus' sexual liaison with the demigoddess Leto produces the twins Artemis and Apollo. By the demigoddess Maia, Zeus fathers Hermes. By the demigoddess Metis, he fathers Athena. (But see the bizarre details: Buxton pp. 48–49.) By the human woman Semele, a princess of the city of Thebes, Zeus fathers the god Dionysus [Dionysos].

Dionysus, being conceived by a mortal woman, would seem more likely to be human—a hero maybe, like Perseus etc., but not a god. (A hero would have extraordinary powers among humans yet would still be vulnerable to injury etc. and would be doomed to die someday.) However, the strange detail of Dionysus being born out of Zeus' thigh (Buxton p. 53) places Dionysus in an ambiguous category: god or mortal? One of Dionysus' cult titles was *Dimētor*, "twice mothered", which might imply two different identities.

The majority of Dionysus' myths show him visiting human communities, demanding that they worship him as a god and punishing them grievously if they refuse. Eventually Zeus acknowledges Dionysus' divinity, and Dionysus is welcomed onto Mt. Olympus. By his arrival, he displaces Hestia as the twelfth Olympian god.

To all these gods, Zeus delegates specific duties or realms-of-influence in the running of the world. For example, Apollo is lord of music, poetry, the science of medicine, the blight of disease (and etc.,) all under Zeus' oversight. All gods are "assistant managers" to Zeus.

Even the god Hades in the Underworld is not Zeus' enemy or rival; Hades is **not** "Satan". Instead, Hades is Zeus' brother, co-worker, and subordinate. He is like a prison warden, serving under Zeus the king.

The real-life origins of some of the gods

The mythology's narrative conceals the historical fact that different deities seem to have entered Greek religion at different stages in prehistory.

For example, Dionysus in myth is treated as the latecomer to Mt. Olympus, but in fact we believe he was part of the Greek pantheon fairly early—by 1200 B.C. at latest—since we find his name written in extant Mycenaean Greek writing tablets.

Conversely, Aphrodite in some versions is treated as the first-born of all reigning gods: born a generation before Zeus, according to Hesiod's *Theogony* (Buxton page 46). Born early, Aphrodite equates to a "first principle" of animal procreation at the beginning of the world.

But in historical fact, Aphrodite looks like a latecomer to Greek religion: maybe circa 900 B.C. To be further discussed on Oct. 1.

Some of the deities came south with the invading Indo-Europeans of 2100 B.C., and others evidently were introduced later. But who's who?

As discussed on Sept. 10, Zeus clearly was a Greek god from the start: a "sky father" in the prehistoric Indo-European pattern of the Germanic god Tiu (or Tyr or Thor), the Roman god Jupiter, and the ancient-India god Dyaus Pitar.

Hera on the other hand looks like originally a non-Greek goddess whom the earliest Greek-speaking Indo-Europeans found after they arrived in Greece around 2100 B.C.

Although Hera's name is Greek ("the Lady"), modern scholars tend to believe that Hera represents a vestige of a pre-Greek mother-goddess—possibly of Minoan Crete—whose worship the early Greeks encountered on mainland Greece and/or on the island of Crete. See the "Aegean mother goddess" Brightspace posting.

Even though the Greeks came as conquerors, they apparently embraced this non-Greek goddess into their religion—partly perhaps as a political concession to the people whom they'd conquered but also surely partly because the goddess seemed to the Greeks to be powerful and spiritually attractive.

Whatever her pre-Greek name had been, this prehistoric goddess eventually received a Greek name, "the Lady," and in the mythology she was "married off" to the Greeks' supreme god, Zeus, to be subordinate to him.

In real-life ancient history, Hera may connect with the goddesses Athena, Artemis, and Persephone, in that all four seem originally to have been non-Greek deities of the prehistoric Aegean region.

The great god Zeus

Buxton pp. 47–49, 68–70

Unlike the God of the Old Testament, Zeus does not create the world. Creation begins before Zeus is born, according to Hesiod's *Theogony*. See Buxton pp. 44 and following.

However, what Zeus does is to impose order on a world that, before Zeus, was chaotic and violent. Zeus is the god of courtroom justice, of balance in Nature, of organization, of due measure, due sequence. At the bottom of the pp. 44–45 chart, you can see that Zeus is biologically the father to most of the gods who will oversee civilized human activity on Earth—for example, Apollo, god of medicine; Hermes, god of trade and travel; and the Muses, goddesses of the arts—and father also to the Horai, who are the four seasons, the natural progress of the year.

Similarly, Zeus is the god of protection: to the weak, to the travelling stranger, to the suppliant (= the sanctuary-seeker). Among many roles, he is *Zeus Horkios*, the "enforcer of oaths" (as in a courtroom) and *Zeus Xenios*, god of hospitality, the protector of strangers. Zeus = **our social contract** that tries to maintain peace and healthy interaction among humans. He also = the laws of physics etc. that order Nature.

In class we looked at three mythical incidents where Zeus reacts when the natural order is threatened. These aren't the only examples but are well known and are mentioned in the textbook. They help illustrate Zeus' relation to the world.

Page 93: The human boy Phaethon is driving the sun-chariot but inexpertly allows the sun to dive too close to the Earth and start to scorch it. Zeus immediately hurls a thunderbolt to destroy Phaethon. The sun's natural course through the sky must be maintained.

Page 91: The hero Asklepios [Asclepius] is the son of Apollo and the world's first physician. When Askelpios uses his amazing skill in order to bring a dead man back to life, Zeus reacts with alarm: He hurls a thunderbolt to kill both doctor and patient. Humans aren't supposed to be brought back to life.

Page 70: A famous and poignant incident from Homer's epic poem the *Iliad*, where Zeus in heaven watches with sorrow as his beloved human son Sarpedon is about to be killed in combat on the battlefield of Troy, below. Zeus has learned that Sarpedon is fated to die in this battle, and he considers saving Sarpedon. But then Zeus decides to let him die, as fated, because even Zeus is not supposed to meddle with humans' fate. That is to say, Zeus' job is to protect and preserve the natural order, not meddle with it.

Zeus creates order after the beginning of the world

In Zeus' mythical "biography", his early career as a young god amounts mainly to his repeated, violent confrontations with primordial forces of tyranny and brutality, in the universe's early days. In this phase, Zeus is like the Clint Eastwood character in a 1970s Hollywood Western movie: riding into town and confronting the bad guys with a violence that matches their own, for the sake of justice and order at the end.

As told by the poet Hesiod, Zeus' early myths can be divided into three stages—

1) Zeus' birth and his revolt against his father, Kronos [Cronus], and the other Titans (Greek *Titanes*). A new world order arises.

2) Zeus creates a kingdom in heaven, with himself as king surrounded by family who are also his subordinates, to whom he delegates the supervision of various aspects of life. This ordering includes a younger generation of gods, all sired by Zeus on various female goddesses or demigoddesses (most

of them being not his wife, Hera). The new gods will be Zeus' "assistant managers" who help oversee the human world or the world of Nature. The universe is being organized as a well-run family business.

3) Zeus and the gods defend their realm against three waves of violent, non-human challengers, who try to take over the universe and revert it to brutality. These are (a) the monster Typhon or Typhoeus, (b) the brutish race of Giants (Greek *Gigantes*), and (c) two semi-divine brothers called the Aloadai (not mentioned in our textbook). The Aloadai episode looks like a storytelling-duplicate of the Giants episode.

In real-life ancient Greece, Zeus' most important sanctuary was the religious-and-sport complex at **Olympia**, in the western Peloponnese. This Olympia was <u>not</u> the same place as Mt. Olympus but was named for "Zeus the Olympian" (of Mt. Olympus): See the pp. 12–13 map. It was at Olympia that the Greeks held their Olympic Games every four years, which were the source of our modern Olympics.

Hera
Buxton pp. 70–72

Zeus' wife and sister. Hera = the best example of a Greek deity who was more important in real-life ancient Greek worship than in the mythology. In ancient Greece, around 600–400 B.C., Hera had high importance as protector of marriage, of married women, and of childbirth, and she was the patron deity of certain cities like Argos and Samos. Yet in the mythology, she oddly comes across as "a real b—ch" with a sometimes-tyrannical personality. She harbours raging jealousy over her husband's love affairs and shows an irrational tendency to scapegoat the various hapless females and their babies (rather than blame her all-powerful husband). Most of her myths involve her persecuting or sabotaging these extramarital paramours or children of Zeus: for example, Leto, Semele, Io, Dionysus, and Heracles. Hera has very few myths of positive accomplishment.

One of the best-known stories about Hera is called the *Dios apatē* ("deception of Zeus"), as told in Homer's *Iliad*, Book 14: During the Trojan War, Zeus temporarily gives aid to the Trojans against the Greeks, as part of a larger scheme. Hera, who completely favours the Greeks over the Trojans, wants to distract Zeus from his efforts and make him fall asleep—so that she may surreptitiously aid the Greeks. So (having borrowed Aphrodite's belt that bestows desirability) Hera seduces her almighty husband while he is watching the war's progress from his vantage point on Mt. Ida near Troy. In a famous passage of the *Iliad*, Zeus is seized with desire and makes wildflowers bloom thickly across the meadow, to be a mattress. After the lovemaking, he falls asleep. While he sleeps, Hera and some of the other gods give war-assistance to the Greeks.

Apollo
Buxton pp. 73–75
The god of music and poetry, also the god of medicine. Conversely, he is also the god who *brings* disease. With his bow, he can shoot arrows that are solid or arrows that are "gentle"—that is, arrows of disease.

In real-life ancient Greece, Apollo had two major sanctuaries: (a) the mountain shrine at **Delphi**, in the central mainland, and (b) the island of **Delos**, in the Cyclades islands of the Aegean Sea. By about 500 B.C., both places were elaborately adorned with temples and public buildings whose beautiful ruins remain today. See the Buxton map pp. 12–13.

In statuary and painting, Apollo was often pictured as a young man about 17 or 20, existing forever at that transition from youth to manhood which, to the Greeks, was the high point of male beauty. Today the name Apollo is still associated with youthful male beauty.

In real-life ancient Greece, Apollo was the patron of citizen boys and of their transition to manhood. Probably the name *Apollōn* means "god of the assembly"—related to the noun *apella*, the assembly of (male) citizens at Sparta. Apollo was imagined as watching over the transition as teenaged boys took their places officially in the city's voting-assemblies and in the army.

Although supposedly only 17 years old, Apollo is wise beyond his years, partaking of his father Zeus' wisdom. In ancient Greece, the wisdom of Zeus or Apollo was reflected in their giving of prophecies, as delivered through the human priests/priestesses at certain of their shrines.

Of all such shrines, the most famous, of course, was Apollo's **oracle at Delphi**. By appointment, a priestess of Apollo would receive a worshipper's questions and give answers supposedly from the god. The answers might be notoriously vague or ambiguous.

The best-remembered example of a double-edged answer from Delphi is described by the Greek historian Herodotus (circa 440 B.C.): It involves a non-Greek king named Croesus in Asia Minor, circa 550 B.C., who planned to attack his neighbours the Persians, whose empire ended at Croesus' frontier. But first Croesus sent to Delphi for advice, and received this answer: "If Croesus attacks, he will destroy a mighty empire." Delighted, Croesus did attack—but the empire in question turned out to be his own, as he was defeated and his kingdom was overrun by Persia.

Partly due to his association with disease, Apollo was imagined as staying aloof from humans. While Athena, Hermes, Aphrodite, Dionysus, and Demeter are gods whose myths and cults emphasize possible *contact* with their human worshippers, Apollo in myth and cult seems to stand apart. For example, the ancient Greeks in their real-life worship of Apollo often were trying to appease him: "Please don't bring us disease."

In Homer's war tale, the *Iliad*—in which Apollo fights on the side of the Trojans against the Greeks—a famous passage in the poem describes the god shooting his arrows of disease into the Greeks' army-camp outside Troy. That is, harm, dealt from afar.

As Buxton (page 75) sums up, "Whether he acts with benevolence or aggression, there is always something distant about Apollo."

Artemis
Buxton pp. 75–77, 49–50
Twin sister of Apollo, is the virgin goddess of wilderness places, such as the forested upper mountainsides of ancient Greece. Her virginity may refer in part to the sanctity of unspoiled Nature. She is patron of wild animals and—conversely—she oversees the hunting of them, which supplies humans with food. Like Apollo, she carries bow and arrows, the hunter's tools.

Artemis' special animals are the deer, bear, boar, and lion. Her relevant cult title is *Potnia Theron*, the "mistress of wild beasts". Below are some images of Artemis Potnia Theron as shown in Sept. 24 class.

Artemis is associated too with the *numphai* (young demigoddesses) who inhabit wilderness places. In myth and art she is sometimes pictured leading a retinue of nymphs.

Corresponding to Apollo's oversight of boys, Artemis in real-life ancient Greece was patron of young citizen-class girls. Like Artemis, the girls would be virgins—in their case until they married (probably during their teen years). Artemis oversaw their approach to marriageable age, after which they would pass to the care of a different goddess, Hera.

From Athens in the 400s B.C. we hear of a "Girl Scouts"-type program, where young girls would take part in ritual dancing and singing, with perhaps also some home-economics lessons and some mythological storytelling and supervised overnight camping. Charmingly, the girls in this program were called the "Little Bears" of Artemis.

Artemis was associated with the moon—which, in its monthly phases, perennially has been linked to females and menstruation.

Surprisingly for a virgin goddess, Artemis was also a patron of childbirth (a job she shared with Hera). Young women in the agony of birth-labour would call on Artemis, recalling the birthing-pains of Leto: See Buxton pp. 49–50.

According one version of the tale, Artemis was the first-born of the twins, and the newborn Artemis volunteered to be midwife to her mother, Leto, in helping her give birth to Apollo. Presumably this odd tale seeks to explain why Artemis in real life was worshipped as a childbirth-goddess.

Athena [Athene]
Buxton pp. 79–80
Patron goddess of the city of Athens—but patron also of Sparta and certain other cities. As the guardian of the citadel (the "acropolis") at any Greek city, Athena was a popular choice to be cities' patron. Appropriately for her military associations, Athena was pictured in a man's armour: with bronze helmet, a shield, a spear, and (sometimes) wearing a bronze breastplate.

Like Artemis and Hestia, Athena is a virgin goddess. The point here seems to be that (1) she is not to be considered as subordinate to any male and (2) she is impenetrable, like the citadel that she guards.

Like Apollo and Zeus, Athena is associated with intellect. She oversees human planning and skill—
• technologies and crafts including weaving, carpentry, shipbuilding, and seafaring
• military strategy
• wisdom generally.
Her animal is the owl. Owls are thought to be wise, like their goddess.

Although associated with women's work such as weaving, Athena features in mythology as the helper of male heroes: Perseus, Heracles, Odysseus, etc. She is one of the deities known as being potentially close to humans.

Athena's cerebral aspect is embodied in Odysseus, that most clever and strategy-minded of all heroes. Conversely, when Athena gives aid to Heracles, she seems to be temporarily remedying that hero's usual lack of brains.

Poseidon
Buxton pp. 70 and 192
The god of the sea is also god of horses, rivers and streams, and of earthquake—a not-obvious combination. Poseidon is brother to Zeus, Hera, Demeter, Hestia, and Hades. After Zeus attained full power, back when the universe was young, Poseidon was allotted the rule of the sea, and Hades the rule of the Underworld. Both brothers are subordinate to Zeus, of course.

Poseidon's personality is pictured in terms of physical power and perhaps turbulence. In this, he personifies the sea: unpredictable and capable of immense power. In Greek art and statuary, Poseidon is shown as muscular to the extent of seeming brutal. Although he shares the strength of his brother Zeus, he lacks Zeus' wisdom.

Historically, Poseidon appears to be originally Greek, primordially Indo-European. The *Pos-* part of his name means "lord, master", and his muscular male persona seems in keeping with primitive Indo-European values. One puzzle, however: The arriving Greek-speaking Indo-Europeans of 2100 B.C. probably had had no prior sea exposure; they had been landlocked nomads. So how could they bring with them a god of the sea?

A possible answer: Poseidon may originally have been an Indo-European god of lakes and running water, also of horses and earthquake (four ideas loosely related to a concept of power—think of a raging river). After the Indo-Europeans had settled in seaside Greece, their god of lakes became their sea god. However, at the same time, the early Greeks may have acknowledged several other, preexisting, pre-Greek sea deities.

The above might explain why our Greek mythology oddly shows a number of different sea-deities, including characters named Proteus and Nereus and the mermaid-like Nereids ("daughters of Nereus"). Among the 50 Nereids is one named Amphitritē, who becomes Poseidon's wife and the mother of their son, Triton (yet another sea god). Surely some of these minor deities were originally pre-Greek sea gods

who got subsumed into Greek belief. The word-root *trit* (shared by Triton and Amphitritē) is considered by modern scholars to be not Indo-European—that is, pre-Greek. Could it have been a word that meant "sea"?

Buxton page 46 mentions Nereus, "the righteous Old Man of Sea", and his 50 sea-nymph daughters.

In mythology, Poseidon sometimes stands in contrast to his niece Athena. Poseidon's emphasis is on brute strength shading to stupidity. Athena's emphasis is on wisdom, cunning, stratagems.

Poseidon is the sea, but Athene gave humans the skill of shipbuilding, to travel the sea. Poseidon is the horse, but Athena gave humans the invention of the horse-bridle, for riding these powerful creatures. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Poseidon hates the hero Odysseus and tries to drown him with storms at sea, but Athena favours Odysseus and guides him safely home.

The mythology says that at the city of Athens, in a contest as to who could give the city the greater gift, Poseidon stabs his trident violently into the ground of the Acropolis and brings forth a saltwater spring—impressive, but not useful. Athena responds by creating the first **olive tree**, as a gift to Athens. In real life, the olive was an Athenian economic staple: Athens' prized olive oil was a lucrative export-product.