# *The East Face of Helicon*

West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth

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**(included: pages 12-19,
on non-Greek loan words)**

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not be called out of the way to ask what there was in Archaic Greece that did *not* come from the orient.'[34]

*Loan words*

Some indication of a people's foreign contacts is given by the foreign words that enter its language. Individual items in isolation prove little. If we speak of tycoons, or of running amok, that is not evidence of significant Japanese or Malay influence on British culture (though it does reflect the fact that we have had dealings with the Far East). If, on the other hand, one can find some dozens of words coming from the same language or area of the world, that can only be the consequence of comparatively close and sustained contact.

Greek has a large proportion of words that have no satisfactory Indo-European etymology. Many of them must have been taken over from other peoples with whom Greek-speakers came into contact after their arrival in the Mediterranean area: certainly from the existing population of Greece, and very probably from the Minoans, but also from peoples living further east, in Anatolia, the Levant, perhaps even Egypt. Not all of these words can now be traced to their source, mainly because we know too little of some of the languages in question. Of those that can, a large majority are of Semitic origin, or at least have cognates current in Semitic languages. A few others may be Anatolian.

Assessments of the quantity of Semitic loan words in Greek have varied enormously. The learned Samuel Bochart (1595–1667) certainly went much too far in his attempts to identify them, as did most of those who wrote on the subject before the present century.[35] Knowledge of the Semitic languages was not what it is today: the study of Akkadian was still in its youth, and Ugaritic was still undiscovered. Scholars were too easily satisfied with partial phonetic correspondences and vague semantic relationships. This century brought an extreme reaction by philologists who sought to limit the number of such borrowings to a mere handful. So long as a link between a Greek word and some Indo-European root could be suggested, however remote, it was considered simply superfluous to entertain a Semitic etymology.[36] In the last thirty years the pendulum has swung back towards the centre. Émilia Masson in 1967 provided a solid basis, and since then a fair number of the older Semitic

[34] 'Angesichts dieser Sachlage wäre es durchaus nicht als abwegig zu bezeichnen, daß man fragte, was im archaischen Hellas eigentlich *nicht* aus dem Orient herstammte' (H. E. Stier, *Historia* 1, 1950, 227).

[35] Lewy (1895) remains a valuable repertoire of results and hypotheses formulated by that time. Masson, 11 ff., gives a brief historical survey of the question.

[36] Cf. Burkert (1992), 34, 174.

etymologies have been brought back into favour and some new ones found. For the first time a distinguished Indo-Europeanist (Oswald Szemerényi) has played a significant part in this research.[37]

The connections will sometimes have been complex and sometimes indirect. Some oriental words may already have made themselves at home in Greece in the Early Bronze Age, before the proto-Greek-speakers arrived, and might have entered Greek from 'Pelasgian'. A likely example is the word for wine, as the vine was established in Greece at an early date. The Greek *woino-* (from which came Latin *uīnum*, from which Germanic *wein*, *win*, etc.) corresponds to Semitic **wainu* (Arabic *wain* 'black grapes', Ethiopic *wăyâne* 'vine'), as also do Hittite *wiyana-*, Luwian *wiyani-*. But in north-west Semitic initial *w-* turned into *y-* not later than the middle of the second millennium; hence Ugaritic *yēnu*, Hebrew *yáyin*. If a Linear A word on a Cnossian pithos fragment is rightly read as *ya-ne* and interpreted as 'wine',[38] it suggests either that Crete shared in the same phonological change or that the word was a not too ancient borrowing from Canaan. The Greek form with *w-*, which appears in Linear B, must have been taken over earlier, if not from a different source (which is less likely).[39]

Two other words of Semitic provenance, *kumīn-* 'cummin' and *sāsam-* 'sesame', appear in both Linear A and Linear B,[40] and might therefore have come into Greek via Minoan rather than directly. Any Egyptian words are likely to have reached Greece by way of either Crete or Phoenicia. A few words appear both in Semitic languages and in Hittite or Luwian; in some cases the Greek form is closer to the one, in some to the other. Besides *woino-*, mention may be made of *kuanos* 'smalt, blue enamel, lapis lazuli' (Hitt. *kuwanna-*, Ug. *ỉqn(i)ů*, Akk. *uqnû*, late Bab. *qunû*); *nitron* 'sodium carbonate' (Hitt. *nitri*, Heb. *néter*, Aram. *nitr-*, Akk. *nit(i)ru*); *kakkabē* 'partridge' (Hitt. *kakkaban-*, Akk. *kakkabānu*, etc.); *kumbakhos* 'helmet' (Hitt. *kubahi-*, Heb. *kôbaʿ* or *qôbaʿ*); perhaps *elephant-* 'ivory, elephant' (Hitt. *lahpa-*), if it is from some Akkadian compound **alap X* 'ox of X'.[41]

[37] Cf. J. P. Brown, *JSS* 13, 1968, 163–91; O. Szemerényi, *Indogermanische Forschungen* 73, 1968, 194 f. = *Scripta Minora* iii, Innsbruck 1987, 1555 f.; *JHS* 94, 1974, 144–57 = *Scr. Min.* iii. 1441–54; *Gnomon* 53, 1981, 113–16; *o-o-pe-ro-si.* Festschrift für Ernst Risch zum 75. Geburtstag, Berlin & New York 1986, 425–50; B. Hemmerdinger, *Glotta* 48, 1970, 40–66; E. Salonen, *Arctos* 8, 1974, 139–44; J. P. Brown and S. Levin, *General Linguistics* 26, 1986, 71–105; Burkert (1992), 33–40, 64, 79; Bernal, i. 59 f. (trailer for a fuller discussion which has yet to appear).

[38] KN Z 4; C. H. Gordon, *JRAS* 1975, 157.

[39] Cf. Bernal, ii. 73 f.

[40] Helck, 124.

[41] As proposed in *Glotta* 70, 1992, 125–8. *Kuanos* and *elephant-* are already attested in Linear B. On the question of Anatolian loan words in Greek cf. R. Gusmani, *Studi linguistici in onore di Vittore Pisani*, i (*Paideia* 24), Brescia 1969, 501–14, esp. 508–13; O. Szemerényi, *JHS* 94, 1974,

The total number of words which appear in Greek in or before the fifth century and for which, in my opinion, a good case has been made for a Semitic connection, satisfying the two criteria of a good phonetic correspondence and a good semantic fit, is something over a hundred. They include the names of animals, insects, and fishes, plants and plant products, minerals, vessels and containers, fabrics and garments, various other manufactured articles, prepared foods, terms used in commerce and religious cult, and the names of the letters of the alphabet. Several of them are already attested (whether directly or indirectly by derived forms, proper names, etc.) in the Linear B tablets. In addition to some already mentioned, one may cite *apēnā* 'cart',[42] *temenos* 'assigned land' (below, p. 36), *khitōn* 'tunic',[43] *khrūsos* 'gold'.[44] Some others may be equally old but by chance not attested in the tablets. Many, no doubt, entered the language in later periods. Dozens more appear after the fifth century, for example names of gems and plants in Theophrastus, Dioscorides, and others. Here again, the first attestation may come long after the word established itself in Greek. A considerable number turn up as dateless glosses in Hesychius. Among these are some attributed to 'the Cypriots'.[45] Cypriot Greek evidently accommodated a larger number of Semitic (presumably Phoenician) words than other forms of Greek, which is not surprising.

Besides actual loan words we should note the existence of calques, that is, Greek words or phrases used in a sense that has to be explained by reference to a foreign model. Detlev Fehling has devoted an article to this subject. Some examples will be encountered in the next few pages, and many from Greek poetic language will be presented in chapter 5.[46]

*Kingship*

Although the institution of kingship was largely defunct in Greece in historical times, it had played a central role in at least the late Bronze

152–6 = *Scr. Min.* iii. 1449–53 with literature. For bibliography on supposed Egyptian words see ibid. 147 = 1444 n. 15.

[42] Ug. *åpnm* 'two-wheeled cart', dual of **åpn* 'wheel', cf. Heb. *ʾôpan* 'wheel', mod. Heb. *ʾafnaim* 'bicycle'.

[43] Heb. *kuttōnet*, *kᵉtōnet* 'tunic', Ug. and Phoen. *ktn*, Aram. *kuttīnā*, *kittūnā*, cf. Akk. *kitû* 'flax, linen, linen cloth'); Brown, 204 f.

[44] Heb. (poetic) *ḥārûṣ*, Phoen. *ḥrṣ*, Akk. and Ug. *ḫurāṣu*.

[45] See Masson, 70–6.

[46] D. Fehling, 'Lehnübersetzungen aus altorientalischen Sprachen im Griechischen und Lateinischen', *Glotta* 58, 1980, 1–24. I will mention here one instance from classical Attic which may have escaped notice. The verb πατεῖν, which normally means 'tread', appears in Ar. *Av.* 471 and Pl. *Phdr.* 273a with the meaning 'study' an author. This seems a very strange extension from 'tread'; but it is exactly paralleled in the usage of the Hebrew verb *dāraš* and its Arabic counterpart. The semantic chain seems to be 'tread down; beat a path to, resort to; go to consult; investigate, study'.

Age, and it may have continued to do so in some regions in the early Iron Age. Evidence about its nature is available on the one hand from the Linear B tablets and on the other from Homeric and other hexameter poetry. This evidence is sufficient to show that Greek kingship shared many basic features with kingship in the Near East.

1.* The king is the *overlord* of a number of local rulers who are his vassals. In the Mycenaean tablets there is a clear distinction between the *wanax*, the king, and the *g*$^{w}$*asileus* (= later *basileus*), who is a lesser chief governing a district. In Homer the distinction is somewhat blurred, but it is noticeable that in the *Iliad* *anax andrōn* is primarily Agamemnon's title, and the word occurs in the plural only of horses' 'masters', whereas chieftains in a group are always *basilēes*. In the original story, presumably, the heroes went to war for Agamemnon because he could summon them to do so whenever he wished, not because they had sworn a common oath as suitors of Helen, as in the post-Homeric version.[47] The 'synoecism' of Attica attributed to Theseus represents the subordination of separate town and village head men to a single overlord. The Hebrew monarchy began with a confederation of twelve tribes deciding that they wanted a single king to rule them.[48] It has been hypothesized that the Assyrian king was 'originally only the *primus inter pares* of an amphictyonic league of sheikhs, as we know the kings of Hana to have been, and possibly also those of Na'iri'.[49]

2. The king has *priestly* functions, praying and sacrificing on behalf of his people. The Greek epic implies this at least for the king away at war. It is Agamemnon in person, not some priest, who must sacrifice at Aulis on behalf of the expedition, and again at Troy, when a truce is solemnized by a sacrifice, it is Agamemnon who utters the prayer and who slaughters the victims with his own hands.[50] Aristotle takes it as one of the three defining roles of the kings of the heroic age that they were in charge of sacrifices.[51] So were the Spartan kings, as we know from Herodotus.[52] It was as a religious functionary that the *basileus* survived at Athens into the Classical period: he supervised the state cult

[47] Cf. Thuc. 1. 9. 1, and L. R. Palmer, *Mycenaeans and Minoans*, London 1961, 91.

[48] 1 Sam. 8–10. The league of twelve has been compared with that of the twelve Ionian towns (Hdt. 1. 142–6), the twelve Aeolic (Hdt. 1. 149), the twelve tribes of the Pylaean–Delphic amphictyony (Aeschin. 2. 116), the twelve cities of Etruria, and the twelve of Campania (Strab. 5. 2. 2, 5. 4. 3), and held to reflect a general Mediterranean pattern based on rotating monthly custody of a central shrine. Cf. M. Noth, *Das System der Zwölf Stämme Israels* (Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament, 4. Folge, Heft 1), Stuttgart 1930; J. P. Brown, *ZAW* 98, 1986, 420 f.

[49] Oppenheim (1977), 99.

[50] *Il*. 3. 275–94.

[51] *Pol.* 1285b9, 23. The other two roles are the third and fourth on my list.

[52] Hdt. 6. 56.

and performed the most solemn and ancient sacrifices. In Israel David and Solomon are described leading their people in worship, blessing them, and making sacrifices or praying for them. 'Throughout the 400 years of the Davidic dynasty ... the king is to be found superintending the organization of worship in all its forms ... the correct conclusion to be drawn from the available evidence is that originally, at least, the king enjoyed the right of officiating at the altar in person and actually exercised this right on certain special occasions.'[53] He was 'a priest for ever after the precedent of Malki-ṣedeq'; Malki-ṣedeq was that king of Salem and priest of El the Most High who blessed Abraham.[54] The kings of Byblos and Sidon were priests of the Lady of Byblos and of Astarte respectively. The Assyrian king too performed sacrifices and took part in many other religious rituals. He was in effect the high priest of the god Aššur.[55] The Hittite king, similarly, became a 'priest of the gods' on his accession, and took charge of the national cults.[56]

Another aspect of the king's importance in the religious field is his activity as a builder of temples and shrines. Agamemnon was remembered as having established shrines of Artemis at Megara and at Amarynthus in Euboea. Solomon built the great temple at Jerusalem, and there are various records of other kings of Israel and Judah establishing altars and sanctuaries (not all of them to Yahweh).[57] The building, embellishment, and restoration of temples was one of the main occupations of the Mesopotamian kings.

3. The king is the *leader in war.* The Mycenaean tablets record the existence of a *lāwāgetās* separate from the *wanax*, but it is not certain whether his function was military. Certainly in the mythological tradition it is taken for granted that the king leads and directs his troops in battle. (If Priam does not, it is no doubt because of his advanced age.) The Spartan kings still did so in the historical period, though not both of them at once. Indeed this had come to be their main function. When the Hebrews decided to institute a monarchy, they dismissed the objections of Samuel, saying 'No! Only let there be a king over us, so that we too may be like all the nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.'[58] Saul and David gave them what they wanted. The Babylonian, Assyrian, and Hittite kings, too, normally led

[53] A. R. Johnson in Hooke, 211–13; cf. Yerkes, 147 f.; G. W. Ahlström, *CANE* i. 597 f.
[54] Ps. 110. 4, Gen. 14. 18–20.
[55] Labat, 17–25, 131–47; Oppenheim (1977), 99 f.
[56] Gurney (1952), 65 f., and in Hooke, 105–10; G. Beckman, *CANE* i. 530.
[57] Thgn. 11 f., Call. fr. 200b; 1 Ki. 6–8, 16. 32 f., 2 Ki. 23. 19, 2 Chr. 28. 24 f.
[58] 1 Sam. 8. 20.

their armies in the field. Only exceptionally did they delegate this responsibility to another.[59]

4. The king is a *judge*: he hears disputes and adjudicates between the disputants. Aristotle specifies this as one of the characteristic functions of the kings of the heroic age, and it is the most conspicuous role of the Hesiodic *basileus*.[60] In Israel, Mesopotamia, and Hatti the king in principle had the same role; in practice he could not personally attend to all disputes arising in his realm, and delegated the duty to others, but he remained the judge of final appeal.[61]

5. The symbol of the king's authority is the *mace* or *sceptre*. Homer devotes several lines to the royal *skēptron* which Pelops received from the gods and which was handed on to Atreus, Thyestes, and Agamemnon.[62] Actual mace-heads from Cyprus and (as Cypriot imports) from Lefkandi, Lindos, and Samos have been preserved, and they resemble mace-heads found widely in the orient.[63] The kings of Sumer, Babylonia, Assyria, Israel, and Asia Minor likewise bore a god-given sceptre, often mentioned as the symbol of their rule.[64] A secondary symbol, often coupled with the sceptre, is the royal *throne*.[65]

6. The kingship is in principle *hereditary*. That is, it normally passed from father to son, provided that the latter was strong enough to take it on and was not elbowed out by some other member of the family or some usurper. If the king had no natural son, he would adopt one as his successor designate. The king's wife might be an influential figure, and even rule as monarch after her husband's death, as in the case of Sammuramat (Semiramis), the widow of Shamshi-Adad V of Assyria, who ruled for five years (810–805) while her son was a minor.[66] In Greek mythology Clytaemestra is portrayed as being the effective ruler of Mycene/Argos after Agamemnon's death, so long as Orestes is a child and absent; then he asserts his right to the throne. In the *Odyssey*, with Odysseus presumed dead and Telemachus still young and weak, it

[59] Oppenheim (1977), 102; Gurney (1952), 65. When Muwatalli II came to the Hittite throne in 1295, he gave his brother Hattusili command of the army, as we know from the latter's autobiography.

[60] *Th.* 85–90, 434, *Op.* 38 f., 248–64, etc.; cf. my notes on *Th.* 85–6 and *Op.* 9; Aristotle as in n. 51.

[61] A. R. Johnson (as n. 53), 206 f.; Oppenheim (1977), 102; Gurney (1952), 65.

[62] *Il.* 2. 101–8, cf. 1. 279, 2. 205 f., 9. 98.

[63] M. R. Popham and L. H. Sackett, *Lefkandi* i, London 1980, 252 and pl. 93; A. M. Snodgrass, *Cyprus and Early Greek History*, Nicosia 1988, 16 f.

[64] Akk. *haṭṭu*, Heb. *maṭṭeh*, *šébeṭ*; *KAI* 214 (Zincirli, Aramaic inscription of Panammu I, *c.*780–743), 3 and 8.

[65] See p. 563.

[66] Oppenheim (1977), 104; Gurney (1952), 66 f.

appears that whoever marries Penelope will become the king. The Theban throne similarly goes with Jocasta after Laius' death.

7. After his demise the king may become an *object of cult.* At Ebla the deceased kings seem to have had something like divine status, and to have been the recipients of important sacrifices and complex rites. From Babylonia and Hatti there is documentary evidence that their statues received shares of temple offerings. Memorial stelai to Assyrian kings were anointed with oil and offerings were brought to them. In a king-list from Ugarit the names are accompanied by the divine determinative.[67] In Hittite texts the death of a king is regularly expressed by saying that 'he became a god'. As for Greece, we can mention (i) the huge hero-shrine of an anonymous king at Lefkandi, dating from the first half of the tenth century; (ii) Homer's references to regular propitiatory sacrifices to Erechtheus at Athens; (iii) the eighth-century archaeological evidence for cults of heroes, often identified with famous kings of the past; (iv) the literary evidence that the Spartan kings received heroic honours after death.[68]

The combination of all these features cannot be accidental. The institution of kingship as it existed in Greece in the late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age reflects a pattern that is essentially that of a Near Eastern monarchy.[69]

Apart from the figure of the king himself, there is the palace and its organization. As in the East, the so-called palace is not just a residence and court but a Department of Trade and Industry, with extensive storage facilities and archives. There is a work force of 'king's men' (*wanak-teroi*) dependent on the palace.[70] With its centralized administration and record-keeping, the Greek palace of the late Bronze Age represents an imposition on the economic system that simply disappeared when the palaces were destroyed around 1200. The Minoan palaces provided the immediate model, but it was the oriental kingdoms that set the pattern. In their classic study of the Linear B archives, Ventris and Chadwick

[67] In southern Mesopotamia some kings used the divine determinative during their lifetimes, but this practice died out during the Kassite period.

[68] (i) M. R. Popham, E. Touloupa, and L. H. Sackett, *Antiquity* 56, 1982, 169–74, and *Archaeol. Reports* 1981/2, 15–17, 1982/3, 12–15, 1983/4, 17; (ii) *Il.* 2. 550 f.; (iii) J. N. Coldstream, *JHS* 96, 1976, 8–17, and *Geometric Greece*, 341–57; (iv) Xen. *Resp. Lac.* 15. 9, and perhaps Alcman, *PMGF* 5 fr. 2 ii 13.

[69] Here I have considered kingship only in its material and functional aspects. There will be more to say in chapter 3 on the ideology of kingship as it is reflected in Greek and oriental literary texts.

[70] M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, 2nd ed., Cambridge 1973, 120; cf. B. R. Foster in R. Hägg and N. Marinatos (edd.), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces (Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens, 10–16 June 1984)*, Stockholm 1987, 11–16.

found that the most useful and significant analogies were presented by the palace archives from Nuzi, Alalakh, Ugarit, and Ur.

In spite of some differences of climate and culture, the similarities in the size and organization of the royal palaces and in the purposes for which the tablets were written ensure close parallels, not only in the listed commodities and their amounts, but even on occasion in details of phraseology and layout.[71]

*Treaties*

Many treaties between Near Eastern rulers are known. The largest number preserved are from the Hittite empire, dating from between 1500 and 1200 and written in Akkadian or Hittite, but we also have Sumerian examples from the third millennium, Syrian ones from the second and first millennia, and Assyrian ones from between 825 and 625. Naturally there is some variation at different periods and in different countries, but there are also certain constant elements and a common basic structure which show that we are dealing with a single broad web of tradition.[72]

Greek treaties often display the same features, and the rituals associated with Greek treaty-making and the terminology surrounding it are largely matched in the Near East. The earliest evidence comes from the Homeric account of the agreement concluded between Agamemnon and Priam in the *Iliad* (3. 67–120, 245–302). From the historical period we have a report of the formal agreement made in about 630 by the colonists of Cyrene and the mother-city Thera, original treaty inscriptions from the second half of the sixth century onward, and many literary records of treaties.[73] The elements that link Greek with oriental treaties are as follows.

First of all there are certain conventional stipulations that recur in many treaties over the centuries. The contracting parties bind themselves, or a great king may bind his vassal,

1. to have the same friends and the same enemies;[74]

[71] Op. cit., 106.

[72] E. F. Weidner, *Politische Dokumente aus Kleinasien* (Boghazköi-Studien, 8–9), 1923; J. Friedrich, 'Staatsverträge des Ḫatti-Reiches in hethitischer Sprache', *MVAG* 31/1, 1926, and 34/1, 1930; *ANET* 199–206, 529–41, 659–61; *TUAT* i. 130–89; Parpola–Watanabe (1988); H. Otten, *Die Bronzetafel aus Boğazköy*, Wiesbaden 1988; McCarthy (1978); P. Karavites, *Promise-Giving and Treaty-Making. Homer and the Near East*, Leiden 1992; Brown, 253–83.

[73] The material is collected in H. Bengtson, *Die Staatsverträge des Altertums*, ii, 2nd ed., Munich 1975.

[74] Already in Naram-Sin's treaty with the king of Elam (22nd century), McCarthy, 18; standard in the Hittite treaties, ibid. 32 n. 24, 182 n. 13; M. Weinfeld, *JAOS* 93, 1973, 198; Exod. 23. 22 (Brown, 263); oath of the Delian League, Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 23. 5; *SEG* 26. 461 + 28. 408 + 32. 398 = R. Meiggs and D. M. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions*, 2nd ed., Oxford 1988, 312 no. 67 bis (Sparta, late fifth century); Thuc. 1. 44. 1, 3. 75. 1, Xen. *Hell.* 2. 2. 20, etc.