

FOUNDATIONS OF
THE CLASSICAL WORLD

CONTENTS

History	1
Philosophy - Religion	10
Art	26
Literature	35
Language	43

ART

LANGUAGE - LITERATURE

B.C.

B.C.

1550 - Invention of alphabetic writing in Syria

1000-700 - Geometric pottery in Greece

800-700 - Homer composes *Iliad* and *Odyssey*

800 - First 5 books of Old Testament first set down

780 - Alphabetic writing begins in Greece using Phoenician alphabet

760-400 - Writings of Prophets in Old Testament

720 - Citadel of Sargon II at Khorsabad (winged human-headed bulls)

700 - Hesiod's poetry

660-580 - Kouros and Kore figures in Greece

650 - Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh

650-530 - Attic black-figured pottery

600-540 - Babylonian Temple of Marduk with Hanging Gardens

600 - Sappho's poetry
- Alceus' poetry

530 - Treasury of Siphnians in Delphi

530 - Attic red-figured pottery

534 - Thespis, first actor

B.C. 520 - Palace at Persepolis

HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

Oswald Spengler, an obscure teacher of mathematics in Munich, published his *Decline of the West* during the last year of World War I. In this work Spengler maintained that the sum total of knowledge that could be derived from the study of history was the simple recognition that civilizations followed a pattern of development from chaos, to provisional form, to realized form, to disintegrating form, to chaos. He put it this way in his introduction:

Mankind . . . has no aim, no idea, no plan, any more than the family of butterflies or orchids. "Mankind" is a zoological expression, or an empty word. I see . . . the drama of a number of mighty cultures, each springing with primitive strength from the soil of a mother-region to which it remains firmly bound . . . Each culture has its own new possibilities of self-expression which arise, ripen, decay, and never return . . . I see world history as a picture of endless formations and transformations, of the marvelous waxing and waning of organic forms.

The time and context of its publication account for much of the popularity Spengler's work enjoyed with his contemporaries; Europe was engaged in fearful battle, and the civilization it represented seemed to be tottering in a precarious balance. Forces were at work which few, if any, minds could comprehend, and Spengler's views deemed such comprehension useless; for, as he said:

It is not a matter of choice--it is not the conscious will of individuals, or even that of whole classes or peoples that decides. The expansive tendency is a doom, something daemonic and immense, which grips, forces into service, and uses up mankind . . .

The true fool was he:

. . . who does not understand that his outcome is obligatory and insusceptible of modification, that choice is between willing this and willing nothing at all . . .

Now Spengler's time is not totally unlike our own, and we might be

Egypt on every side. By the time of Akhenaton (c. 1380 B.C.), Egypt had entered a "time of troubles" and decline that continued for centuries; and the Near East came under new management.

Egyptian rule in the Levant was successfully challenged by the Hittites, who had destroyed the power of Babylon around 1595 B.C., thus marking the end of Mesopotamian expansion. The Kassites, who ruled in Babylonia after 1595 B.C., relinquished the ambitions of their predecessors and turned their attention to the defense of their eastern frontier against Assyrian raiders. By 1450 B.C. the Hittites had established control over Anatolia, and their expansion reached almost to the Aegean Sea.

The chief opponents of the Hittite rulers were the Hurrians, originally from Armenia, who established their kingdom of Mitanni around 1500 B.C. in a fertile valley of an eastern tributary of the Tigris. After more than a century of slow expansion and intermittent conflict with the Hittites, the Hurrians were finally overrun and their capital sacked about 1360 B.C. The collapse of the kingdom of Mitanni and the subsequent retreat of the Hurrian population into Armenia radically altered the political history of the Tigris-Euphrates region. The chief beneficiaries of this upheaval were the Assyrians, who were now free to pursue their struggle with the Kassite kingdom of Babylon. From these encounters the Assyrians slowly emerged as the principal military power in the Near East.

The Assyrians were a Semitic people who lived in the region of the Upper Tigris. From about 2500 B.C. they were subjects of a succession of Mesopotamian dynasties (Sumerians, Akkadians, Amorites, and Hurrians). No doubt the centuries of subordination and a hostile environment forced the development of warlike habits and imperial ambitions. Under Tiglath-Pileser I (1115-1077 B.C.) Assyrian armies were active in Syria but were forced to abandon an aggressive policy; after this initial show of strength--a testing as it were--the Assyrians settled back, content to consolidate and develop their kingdom on the Tigris.

But all sleeping giants must finally awaken, and the Assyrian army under the leadership of Assurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.) began to build an empire based upon a matchless army, the terrorization of all people who resisted, and an advanced system of political administration. The exigencies of war determined the whole character of the Assyrian system; the state was a military machine, and the king became a central figure in society because of his position as commander-in-chief of the army. However, since he was only an earthly representative of the god Assur and not a living god like the pharaoh of Egypt, he sought to consolidate his position of authority by a wise distribution of the booty acquired through conquest.

In the course of empire-building, the Assyrians followed a policy of torture and cruelty which earned them the hatred of all nations of antiquity. Skinning people alive, impaling them, and burning entire villages were only a few of the methods employed by the Assyrians as they pursued a policy of "aggressive pacification" designed to "stabilize" unruly