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# LANGUAGES, WRITING AND LITERATURE

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A new level of development in writing and literature was reached from the beginning of the Iron Age, while new patterns in the distribution of language families and languages developed. The economic, cultural and social changes which large sectors of humanity went through led to the appearance of new nuclear regions and centres of historical development, but also to an increasing mobility of tribal communities, especially those of the nomads. The population grew in some regions. The result was far-reaching migrations in which whole tribes expanded and even left their original areas of settlement and occupied new ones, bringing with them their language and cultural traditions.

On the other hand empires rose, some of which were dominated by dynasties of tribal origin. Their language often became the official language of the empire; it was used by élites of different ethnic origin who were now included in one empire. In this way some language families expanded their use within regions. In addition some branches of language families expanded geographically as did Chinese, Sanskrit, Greek, German, Celtic, Turkic, Iranian and so on.

Thanks to many records surviving since the fifth century bc in the Greek, Roman, Chinese, Indian, Persian, Egyptian Hebraic traditions because of the long-lasting continuity of many languages it is possible to reconstruct the development of languages their diffusion during the centuries covered by this volume.

Due to the emergence and interaction of cultural areas, states, trade connections and migrations, some languages came to play a dominant role as

instruments of oral and written communication. For example, the members of the upper social groups in the Hellenistic kingdoms and colonies, from Spain to Central Asia and North India, could communicate in Greek. The Chinese language became a written *lingua franca* of the upper classes in East Asia. Later the same happened with Latin in parts of Europe, western Asia and North Africa, as well as with Arabic from the second half of the seventh century ad. In Africa south of the Sahara and in the Americas similar processes took place of language families and languages spreading and acquiring a special status, but because written sources are lacking, it is very difficult to gain an accurate picture of this.

The importance of the progress that took place in writing and reading can hardly be overestimated. In the Mediterranean regions, the Greeks developed their own script based on that of the Phoenicians in Western Asia. They created an alphabetic script, which made it possible to write a language – any language – by exclusively using simple phonetic signs, instead of rendering words by means of ideograms, as had been typical of earlier systems of writing. In this way it was also possible to use only a limited number of letters – some twenty to thirty, used in an endless variety of combinations – to represent unknown words and names. The invention of an alphabetic script indeed meant a revolution. It made writing accessible to larger social groups. Writing could be taught and learned more easily and used in daily life. The traditional systems of writing in Egypt and China also changed, but only by simplifying the forms of their signs.

The new level of development in writing in the Mediterranean, together with the wide spread of the Greek and Latin languages, allowed a higher level of long distance communication, of data storage and of sharing the results of philosophical and scientific thought.

Thanks to the Egyptian papyrus which had already been in use for a long time and the new Chinese invention of paper, very useful and cheap materials were available which allowed one to write cursively by linking the signs or letters, whereas other and earlier systems which used stone, metal, clay, wood or bone required one laboriously to engrave one sign or picture after the other.

In those parts of the world where these new systems of writing were spreading, it became possible to record the oral tradition as literature and to develop a diversified literature which was disseminated by copies written in professionally organized writing workshops.

Manuscripts could be sold and stored in private and public libraries.

Although the first steps in writing took place around 3000 bc it was from the beginning of the Iron Age that writing reached a level which allowed a preservation of human ideas and communications on a large scale. The cultural and scientific history of humanity had risen to a new level.

## SOUTH ASIA

The period from the seventh century bc, to the seventh century ad in South Asia provides evidence of new uses of oral and written literature in a variety of languages. The rather limited literature of the ritual hymns and commentaries of the early first millennium bc is gradually enlarged to an immense richness of literary sources in all fields of knowledge.

Some of these were initially part of the oral tradition but were converted into literate forms.

Among the more striking features of language as communication is that different social groups, as well as those supporting diverse ideologies and religious persuasions, used specific but varied languages. The foundational language in northern India was Sanskrit which, in its earliest available form as the language of the Vedic texts, is referred to in linguistic terms as Old Indo-Aryan. It had links with Old Iranian and is counted among those languages which were derived from Indo-European. There was therefore a common area of close linguistic connection which extended beyond India. That the use of Sanskrit was not uniform and that elements of local linguistic forms from non-Aryan languages were incorporated into it is evident from the regional variations which it registers by the third century bc.

Sanskrit was initially used by *br̄ahmann. a* authors. Vedic Sanskrit, the language of the corpus of religious texts known as the *Vedas* was closer to the reconstructed Indo-European language than the later classical Sanskrit which became current from about the fifth century bc. This latter variety was also used in royal inscriptions but not in the earliest of these. The preferred language for inscriptions was, to begin with, *Pr̄akrit*, a collective term referring to a number of more commonly used languages, all of which were derived from Sanskrit but incorporated local variants. *Pr̄akrit* was also patronized in later times by the Jainas. The Buddha preached in a regional *Pr̄akrit* from the middle Gaṅga plain and the Buddhist Canon was eventually written in *P̄ali* which was related to Vedic Sanskrit. Some Buddhist texts of the northern tradition, compiled in the extreme north of the subcontinent, used a hybrid Sanskrit. Inscriptions in Greek and Aramaic were also issued by kings whose territories included north-western India and Afghanistan, presumably for communicating with their Iranian and Greek subjects in these areas. In the peninsula and south India the language base was Dravidian and the oldest attested language among these was Tamil.

Its earliest survival is as heroic poems, initially recorded orally. Later, Tamil was used in votive inscriptions from the second century bc. Other Dravidian-based languages such as Kannad. a and Telugu are recognizable from around the mid-first millennium ad. Even as early as the third century bc there was a lively linguistic diversity, a feature which was to be characteristic of Indian civilization.

There is so far no confirmed evidence of the adaptation of the Harappan script to writing in this later period. The earliest record of writing is in the form of inscriptions. Those of the extreme north use Kharos.t. hi derived from the Western Asiatic Aramaic. Elsewhere and more widely prevalent is the use of *Br̄ahm̄ī*. In the south, the Tamil- *Br̄ahm̄ī* script was an adaptation of *Br̄ahm̄ī* to Tamil. Strips of palm-leaf (*t̄alapattra*) or birch-bark (*bh̄urjapattra*) were tied together to form a book (*grantha*) and held in place by wooden covers. The word *grantha* was later used sometimes for a script.

The authors of the various compositions from this period were, to begin with, either bards or priests and monks. Poets, scribes or those trained in professions

requiring literacy came later. Literacy was more frequent among monks and was also to become the hallmark of the learned *br̄ahmann. a*, as also among those who wrote manuals on professional information and knowledge, as of course among scribes. Audiences and readers varied according to time and place: the bard recited his compositions before chiefs and kings; the court poet was in the service of the king; royal proclamations in the form of inscriptions were a means of communication between king and subject; records of donations were both public and legal statements. The uses of literacy were therefore multiple and were not limited to religious texts.

There is some debate as to whether the writing of the first surviving grammar of Sanskrit, the *As. t. ādhyāyā* of *Pāṇini* in the fifth-fourth centuries bc should assume the existence of literacy. The degree of system and rationality in the structure of syntax makes this a remarkable work. *Pāṇini* may have also been familiar with the earlier etymological study of *Yaska*, the *Nirukta*, probably made necessary because of changes introduced by non-native speakers and also the expected change from the wider use of Sanskrit. *Pāṇini*'s grammar standardized the use of Sanskrit and became the basis of classical Sanskrit, in some ways different from Vedic Sanskrit. It also laid the foundation for a series of grammars in subsequent times which indicate a sophisticated understanding of language. The analysis of language was a central focus of the intellectual equipment of early Indian thinkers.

The two strands of the oral and the literate remain in parallel importance for a large part of this period and even though the introduction of literacy changed the function of language, the oral tradition was not discarded but came to be treated as a special tradition with its own professional expertise. Sound had meaning and was associated with magical power. The mispronunciation of even a single syllable could have disastrous consequences.

Therefore the Vedic *mantras* or formulae were memorized only by *br̄ahman. as* through a variety of intricate mnemonic devices. Doubtless this was also an attempt to exclude certain social groups which remained permanently uninitiated. Phonetic exactitude became essential to ritual performance and as an important part of the construction of the language.

Grammatical forms in Sanskrit draw heavily on this exactitude. Those who mispronounced the language and therefore spoke it incorrectly were dismissed as the *mleccha*, a word which later also referred to those outside the social pale. Language therefore played a significant role in demarcating socially acceptable groups. The Vedic corpus was divided into *śruti*, that which is heard, such as the *mantras*, and *smṛiti*, and that which is memorized, such as the manuals and codes of social behaviour.

The corpus of Vedic literature – hymns, rituals, commentaries on these and philosophical discourses – remained largely within the oral tradition until well into the first millennium ad. Indo-European parallels are evident but so also is the appropriation of the language and mythology of the indigenous peoples in the areas where the authors of these texts came to be established. The earlier notion that there was a sharp language dichotomy between the speakers of Indo-Aryan and of other languages is now being softened somewhat by the probability that there may have been more bilingualism than is generally conceded.

In contrast to the closed tradition of Vedic learning, the epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, were more open. The epics were initially composed by bards but were taken over by priestly authors and converted into the

sacred literature of the Vaishnavite religion. The *Bhagavad-gītā* was added to the *Mahābhārata* and has in recent centuries come to be regarded as specially central to many Hindus. Since the epic tradition was an open one, interpolations in later times were common. Nevertheless the narrative weaves its way through many events stereotypical of the epic all over the world. The bard or *śūta* maintained the lengthy genealogies claiming to record rulers and king-lists over at least three millennia. These lists were reconstituted by the *brāhmaṇas* and incorporated into the *Purāṇas* which contained legendary material important to traditional history as well as to a range of religious sects. The reformulation of bardic compositions by literate priestly authors, who then used the texts to enhance their own prestige, was not an uncommon activity.

Similar in function and mood to the epics but more fragmentary in form are the Tamil poems on love and war, the *Et.t.uttokai* and the *Pattupāṭi*, collected in the *Ṣaṅgam* anthology.

Some are superb vignettes of the life of the common people, others eulogize heroic values. The first Tamil grammar, the *Tolkappiyam*, doubtless contributed to stabilizing the use of Tamil in many parts of south India. Two later Tamil compositions, the *Maṇimēkalai* by Cattanaṛ and the *Ṣilappadikāram* by Ilankovataikal, set in a Buddhist and a Jaina framework, pointed towards the eventual change from bardic literature to courtly literature as also does the *Tirukkural*.

Courtly literature comes to fruition in the increasing use of Sanskrit in royal courts where *nāṭaka* or plays and *kāvya* or long poems were commonly composed. Play-writing as a form of courtly literature had many practitioners among whom were Bhāsa, Kālidāsa, Śādraka and Viśākhadatta. The early plays of Bhāsa were light-hearted romances with nuggets of fine poetry, pertaining to the interests of courtly circles, particularly courtly love. Kālidāsa, dating perhaps to the mid-first millennium ad, became the measure of courtly literature for future poets, some of whom happily plagiarized or imitated his compositions.

His play, *Ṣakuntalā*, was acclaimed by Goethe and the German Romantic Movement, and was important therefore even to Orientalism. Śādraka and Viśākhadatta moved from romance to the realities of everyday life and to court politics. The focus of courtly literature being more often in the writing of comedies is also indicated by two reigning kings who wrote plays, Harṣavardhana of Kanauj and Mahendravarman, the Pallava king. Bhartrihari and Bhaṭṭi are particularly remembered for their exquisite short poems.

Another *genre* of courtly literature which became more common in later centuries was the *carita* or biography. It had its beginnings in Aśvaghosha's *Buddhacarita* or life of Buddha and Bhaṭṭi's *Harsacarita*, on the seventh-century king, Harṣavardhana. The characteristic of such literature, as indeed also its weakness, was the loyalty of the poet to the subject of the biography.

Fables and stories remained the stock-in-trade of every language for all time. Perhaps the best known were those collected under the title of the *Pañcatantra*, which were generic to such narratives in later periods but also in other cultural and social idioms. The *Pañcatantra* unfolds in a brahmanical context. Stories not entirely dissimilar but with a Buddhist ethic are collected in the *Jātaka* texts. Similar collections come from other ethical and ideological backgrounds in later periods. There are also the more straightforwardly narrative collections such as the *Brhatkathā* of Guṇadhya which is sometimes described as the prototype of the 'story' literature which was to become a characteristic *genre* of Indian literature. A

more lively example of this is the famous collection of stories by Dan.d. in, the *Da'sakumarācarita*.

Technical literature during this period is almost entirely in Sanskrit. Emphasis on ritual and on social obligations as sacred duty were central to the brahmanical view of life as is evident in the *Gr. hyasāstras* and the *Śrautasāstras*. The codification of such obligations through rules of caste was an attempt at suggesting the norms of society. Texts carrying this codification, such as the *Dharmasāstras* and the *Dharmaśāstras*, were mistakenly taken for legal codes by colonial and early Orientalist scholarship in their search for formal Hindu law. Such texts referred to customary practice, reflected a hierarchical view of society and proclaimed the form of normative behaviour. Other historical sources point to actual social behaviour, sometimes contradicting these norms and therefore the statements in these texts cannot be regarded as legally binding codes. Furthermore they reflect the perspective of a small, although powerful, section of society, the articulate and influential *brāhman. as* and should therefore not be taken as descriptions of social reality. That the texts were composed in Sanskrit is again suggestive of their circulation in the narrower circles of royal courts and brahmanical scholarship. Where non-brahmanical texts were more influential there the norms of social behaviour would also have differed. This different perspective, such as that of the Buddhists and the Jainas, needs to be highlighted much more than it has been in the past.

Brahmanical thought emphasised that *moks. a* or salvation lay in a life of balanced living involving the three important aspects of existence – *dharma* or sacred duty, *artha* or livelihood and *kāma* or pleasure. As there are texts on *dharma* there are also texts on the other two aspects. The single most important *Arthaśāstra* is that of Kautilya which deals with the political economy of a well-administered kingdom and has much to say on the activities and livelihood of various professions. The *Kāmasāstra* of Vātsyāyana interprets the notion of pleasure as relating to sexual activity.

The study of medicine, astronomy and mathematics was an early concern. The construction of altars required for Vedic sacrificial rituals involved a knowledge of geometry which is reflected to some degree in the *Śulvasāstras*. The sacrificing of animals also encouraged an interest in anatomy. However, medical knowledge of an advanced nature is evident from the early centuries ad in the treatises of Caraka and Suśruta. Veterinary medicine, especially that pertaining to horses and elephants, became an important area of study.

Two major features of Indian mathematics revolutionized the role of science. One was the concept of the cipher in the decimal system and the other was the use of numerical signs to represent the figures from 1 to 9. These were borrowed by the Arabs from the Indians and went to Europe as Arabic numerals. Ideas on astronomy are reflected in the earliest writings and some scholars have suggested that there might have been a familiarity with Mesopotamian ideas. The link with Western Asia becomes more evident at the beginning of the first millennium ad. However, some of the more radical theories of the fifth-century mathematician, Āryabhaṭa, as for example that the earth revolves around the sun and rotates on its own axis, were neither developed further in India nor taken up in Western Asia and the Mediterranean lands. References to the Paulīśa and Romaka *siddhānta*, among others, in the *Br. hatsaśāhita* of Varāhamihira, dating to the mid-first millennium ad, have been seen as systems associated with Paul of Alexandria and Rome. Astronomy was differentiated from astrology although the latter often attempted to draw on the former for intellectual legitimacy. This is indicated by the use of figures in

the cosmology of time which are borrowed from astronomy but treated in a fanciful fashion.

The origins of philosophical speculation are traced back to the discourses of the *Upanis. ads.* The major change was the move from the centrality of sacrificial ritual to a free exploration of knowledge. Many of the concepts developed in these discourses were taken up by groups of teachers who founded their own systems and among these the more significant were the Buddhists, the Jainas, the A<sup>-</sup> j<sup>-</sup> ivikas as well as the Ca<sup>-</sup> rva<sup>-</sup> ka or Loka<sup>-</sup> yata, the last named being given to materialism and therefore regarded as controversial. Further developments of philosophical systems came either from non-br<sup>-</sup> ahmanic monastic institutions where the literacy and learning of monks was much prized or later from the settlements of br<sup>-</sup> ahm<sup>-</sup> an. a scholars who were given grants of land by royal or aristocratic donors.

The possibility of philosophical speculation covering a range of thought and enquiry was made feasible by the introduction of literacy and by the freeing of certain categories of people from the labour of having to work at a profession. Literacy possibly gave a rational edge to philosophical debate which was centred on a dialectical method: the stating of the proposition, the stating of an opposing point of view and the attempt at arriving at a considered position. Philosophical ideas were classified into six systems by the early centuries ad.

Royal patronage and large donations from trading communities and landowners enabled the Buddhists, Jainas and A<sup>-</sup> j<sup>-</sup> ivikas to establish monastic complexes where the pursuit of learning was as important as the search for salvation. The P<sup>-</sup> ali Canon of the Buddhists had at its core the *Tripit.aka* texts, which were only a part of the gradual growth of a large literature in P<sup>-</sup> ali. There was also a concern for constructing the past in a historical form from the particular perspective of the sect writing the history. The *D<sup>-</sup> ipavam. sa* and the *Mah<sup>-</sup> avam. sa* recorded the history of Sri Lanka as perceived by the influential Therav<sup>-</sup> ada Buddhist sect. An underlying nexus in this situation was that literacy was also encouraged by the trading community. Literature in P<sup>-</sup> ali, at a date later than that of the *Tripit.aka*, was also influenced by the courtly style as is evident from the poems in the *Therag<sup>-</sup> ath<sup>-</sup> a* and the *Ther<sup>-</sup> ig<sup>-</sup> ath<sup>-</sup> a*, ascribed to monks and nuns of earlier times, but clearly composed much later. The Jaina Canon is more difficult to date and of its many texts the *Ac<sup>-</sup> ara 'ngas<sup>-</sup> utra* is believed to be among the earliest.

The use of P<sup>-</sup> ali and Pr<sup>-</sup> akrit by Buddhist and Jaina authors did not preclude their using Sanskrit when they so required. Such religious groups proclaimed that there were no social barriers to those who joined them and therefore it was more apposite that they use a popular language. On occasion they even wrote their own versions of texts originally authored by br<sup>-</sup> ahman. as. In such versions their interpretations were at variance with the original, an example being the Jaina version of the epic, the *R<sup>-</sup> am<sup>-</sup> ayana*, by Vimalas<sup>-</sup> uri written in Pr<sup>-</sup> akrit in about the mid-first millennium ad and entitled the *Paumacariyam*. The insistence that those of high status should use Sanskrit was not always observed. Thus a high point in Pr<sup>-</sup> akrit poetry were the verses of H<sup>-</sup> ala. The author shows an impressive knowledge of the life of ordinary people and of people from rural areas, which as a theme is less common for this time and possibly points to a more plebian authorship than the one generally claimed, namely that of a king of western India.

Finally, a category of texts which are often overlooked in discussions on language and literature, but which are important to communication in society, are the inscriptions found extensively in India engraved on stone surfaces and on copperplates. A few were royal proclamations such as those of the Mauryan ruler

Aśoka, in which the king stated his views on governance, relations with his subjects, social norms and sacred duty. Some inscriptions are biographical statements about rulers and their activities. These are up to a point factual but also include some eulogistic passages. Other inscriptions record acts of heroism on the battlefield or in defense of a village. But by far the majority are records of donations. These were either Buddhist or Jaina votive inscriptions contributing towards the construction of a religious monument, and came from a wide range of professional and land-owning families, or else they were royal donations and therefore more substantial and spectacular than the former kind and made to monasteries or to learned *brāhmanas*. Inscriptions in South Asia played a role not too dissimilar to court annals in other societies. Their function was essentially to proclaim the acts of those in power as well as to record these acts, particularly where such records were regarded as legal documents.

# SOUTH-EAST ASIA AND OCEANIA

## Languages

The languages of South-east Asia and Oceania belong to different language families: Sino-Tibetan, Tai, Miao-Yao, Austro-Asiatic, Austronesian, Papuan and Australian. The languages belonging to these families are often spread over a large number of countries, and in particular the northern part of South-east Asia has a complicated mosaic of languages belonging to several language families.

The Myanmar language (c. 24 million speakers) belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, together with other Myanmar languages such as Karen and Kachin. So does Chinese, which is spoken in several dialects by the Chinese as well as by Chinese immigrants in all Southeast Asian countries. The Myanmar people migrated from the north-east into Myanmar in the ninth century ad; their language replaced Pyu, which is now extinct but which was until then a culturally and politically very important language in northern and central Myanmar.

It also largely replaced M̄on, an Austro-Asiatic language with a great cultural impact, which dominated in Lower Myanmar and a large part of Thailand.

Miao-Yao languages are spoken by small minorities in northern Viet Nam and south China.

Thai and Lao (in Laos) belong to the Tai family. It remains uncertain whether the Tai family is related to other language families (either Sino-Tibetan or Austronesian). Thai is spoken by most of the 52 million inhabitants of Thailand; Lao has 1.5 million speakers.

The Thais and Laotians migrated to Thailand and Laos from the seventh century ad on. They presumably came from an area between Chiangmai and the mountains of Yunnan (China), and they supplanted the originally Khmer, M̄on and other populations. Vietnamese (65 million speakers), Khmer (Kampuchea; 6 million speakers) and M̄on (Myanmar, Thailand) are M̄on-Khmer languages. This is a branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family, with members in continental South-east Asia, in China, in the Indian subcontinent and on the Nicobar Islands. The languages of the first inhabitants of the Malay peninsula (the 'Orang Asli') also belong to it.

The Vietnamese lived in northern Viet Nam until the sixteenth century ad, when they finally defeated the Cham. The latter speak an Austronesian language and used to dominate the south of Viet Nam.

Malay and Javanese belong to the Austronesian language family, which has more than 850 members. Around 300 of these are spoken in Indonesia and Malaysia, around 70 in the Philippines, and almost all the others are spoken in the Pacific area, linguistically one of the world's most diverse regions. Austronesian languages are spoken in Malaysia, Madagascar, insular South-east Asia and the Pacific Islands and they are furthermore spoken by minorities in Taiwan and in every mainland South-east Asian country in addition to Malaysia. Some thousand years ago Malays began to colonize the Malay Peninsula, which was then mainly populated by the Austro-Asiatic speaking Orang Asli. These Malays came from south-east Sumatra, where they had kingdoms from the seventh century ad or even earlier. There are linguistic indications that the Malays ultimately originate from west Kalimantan.

Austronesian languages in the Pacific include Polynesian languages (Hawaiian, Tahitian, Tongan and so on), Micronesian languages and several Melanesian language groups.

Austronesian speakers number between 280 and 300 million. The Austronesian languages with the largest number of native speakers are Javanese (more than 60 million), Malay (up to 30 million), Sundanese (20 million), Cebuano (11.5 million), Tagalog (10 million) and Malagasy (10 million). Malagasy (Madagascar) is closely related to the languages of south Kalimantan. The first Malagasy migrants to East Africa probably left South-east Asia around the seventh century ad.

In New Guinea and the surrounding islands more than 1,000 separate languages are spoken. They belong to two categories of languages, Austronesian and Papuan. The Austronesian languages are spoken in coastal areas. They are Melanesian languages, many of which underwent influence from Papuan languages. They are believed to be the result of more recent Austronesian immigrations into an originally Papuan area.

There are around 750 Papuan languages. These are apparently not members of the same language family, but belong to possibly more than 60 different language families. They are spoken in New Guinea, and furthermore in Northern Halmahera, Alor, Pantar, and parts of East Timor and Kisar in Indonesia, and in parts of New Britain, New Ireland and the Solomon Islands in the Pacific. Linguistic diversity in New Guinea seems to be due to several factors. New Guinea has been inhabited by Papuans for more than 40,000 years.

The nature of its terrain makes it difficult to establish contact with ethnic groups living far away. Finally, Papuan societies often regard their own language as an identity badge to distinguish themselves from other societies.

Like the Papuans in New Guinea, the Aborigines (or original population) of Australia have lived in their continent for more than 40,000 years. At the arrival of the first Europeans in Australia, the Aborigines spoke between 200 and 250 different languages. Nowadays only part of the Aboriginal population still speaks an Australian language, about half of which are extinct. Of the remaining ones, only a few have more than 500 speakers, including Tiwi (near Darwin), Aranda (Alice Springs) and Pitjatjantjara (western Australia).

Most Australian languages are related. The Pama-Nyungan languages form a relatively closely-knit subgroup occupying south and central Australia. But the languages in northern Australia are genetically more remote, and there is uncertainty about the inclusion of some of them (Tiwi) into a single Australian language family. The few remaining data on the (extinct) languages of Tasmania suggest a relationship with the Pama-Nyungan family.

There is no evidence of a genetic relationship of Australian or Tasmanian languages with other languages.

### Writing

Except for Vietnamese, the major South-east Asian languages have (or had) scripts that were derived from the Grantha or Pallava script from south India. In Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines these scripts now have almost entirely been replaced by the Roman script. The oldest written records in South-east Asia are stone inscriptions which are generally in Sanskrit. The oldest inscriptions (in Sanskrit and in Cham) are found in the former Champa empire (nowadays part of Viet Nam). They date from the late fourth century ad.

The earliest Pyu, Khmer and Malay inscriptions date from the seventh century ad. In Java, the earliest inscriptions appear in the eighth century, in Bali in the tenth century, in Myanmar in the twelfth century and in Thailand at the end of the thirteenth century ad. The Myanmar script is originally the M<sup>o</sup> variant of the Pallava script. The Thai script is derived from the Khmer variant. Pallava-derived scripts read from left to right. They are syllabaries: each letter denotes a syllable consisting of a consonant and a following vowel *a* (in some scripts, a vowel other than *a*). This *a* vowel applies by default: if a consonant is followed by another vowel a small vowel sign is used on top, under or after (sometimes even before) the consonant to indicate this. In some scripts, a dummy letter is used in order to write words which begin with a vowel.

If a consonant is followed by no vowel at all (for instance, if the consonant occurs at the end of a word), this is also indicated by a special sign (sometimes called the 'vowel killer').

Finally, clusters of consonants (for example, *-str-* in the Javanese word *sastra* 'literature') are indicated by writing the consonants under each other, as in Javanese. In other scripts vowel-killers are used, or there is no device at all to show that there are no vowels between the consonants making up a cluster. The different shapes of Pallava-derived scripts are probably due to the use of various writing materials: for instance, the use of bamboo caused cuneiform letters in the south Sumatran script, whereas the use of palm leaf allowed roundshaped letters in the Javanese script. The Bataks (in north Sumatra) and the Philippines used writing mainly for recording magico-religious and medicinal knowledge.

In Muslim areas (Malaysia, southern Philippines, Indonesia), the Arabic script came into use only in the eleventh or twelfth centuries at the earliest.

The Vietnamese adopted Chinese writing (an ideographic script) during the Chinese occupation, which lasted from the second to the eleventh century ad. They used it for writing Classical Chinese. In the thirteenth century ad they derived from it a version (called *nom*) for exclusive Vietnamese use. In the Pacific and Australia there are no traditional writing systems, except for the *Rongorongo* script of Rapanui (Easter Island, Polynesia).

This script is remarkable for being entirely indigenous. It is ideographic, and it was used as a device for memorizing sermons by members of the indigenous priest caste. It was already out of use when missionaries discovered it in the nineteenth century, and it has never entirely been deciphered.

### Traditional literature

In the Pacific and Australia traditional literature was oral. This was also the case in Southeast Asian societies that had no writing system, and even in some that did have writing (such as the Bataks and several Philippine societies).

Elsewhere in South-east Asia, oral and written literature co-existed, and in some cases it is hard to keep a consistent distinction between them. In a general way, written literature underwent an influence from cosmopolitan cultures (India, China) and was often cultivated at the courts, whereas oral literature remained more popular and indigenous. India had a strong influence on the various literary traditions in South-east Asia (except in Viet Nam and the Philippines). Translations and local adaptations of Sanskrit and Pali literary works exist in most countries. Versions of the *R<sup>ā</sup>m<sup>a</sup>yana* epic are found everywhere.

They have sometimes found their way into oral literature. Other influential Indian works are the *Pañcatantra* (animal stories) and the *Mah<sup>a</sup>bh<sup>a</sup>rata* epic. Indian

works of a religious or instructive nature were translated into Thai, Khmer, Lao, Myanmar, Javanese and other languages. Indian influence also appears in various verse forms and literary styles. In Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Kampuchea *jātaka* stories (about the Buddha's previous lives) play an important role. Indian influence is still an important factor in the literature of the Malays and other Muslim peoples (particularly in Javanese literature).

In Viet Nam the literature clearly bears the mark of Chinese occupation. From the second to the nineteenth century written literature was dominated by Chinese influence, which included Buddhist and Confucianist elements. Indian influence was not strong in the Philippines, where it seems to have been introduced via the Malays only. Literature was oral, as it still is in some areas.

# EAST ASIA

## Writing materials

The eighth century bc had witnessed the collapse of the central authority of the kings of Zhou, and a few texts were carried over from the heyday of the Zhou dynasty into the following centuries of strife and disunion. The emergence of many major states from the seventh century bc and later, stimulated the development of historiography as each state kept its own court chronicle. The continuing political disunion, and the social and economic changes within each state stimulated the emergence of Chinese philosophy, and eventually, new forms of poetry came into existence as well.

The date of ad 700 disregards Chinese political history as it falls right in the middle of the Tang dynasty (618–906) but the eighth century witnessed an unprecedented flourishing of literature in China, the emergence of various new forms and the development of the art of printing.

If within this long stretch of time from 700 bc to ad 700 any date suggests itself as a turning point it is the year ad 105, which is traditionally regarded as the date of the 'invention' of paper. Paper actually had slowly developed over the preceding two centuries from a cheap wrapping material to a suitable medium for writing, and this had great consequences for the practice of literature.

Before the invention of paper, texts, apart from inscriptions on bronze and stone, were written on bundled strips of bamboo (or wood) and silk. Silk was too expensive for everyday use; wood and bamboo were cheap, but the production process was cumbersome and the resulting books were extremely bulky. The actual volume of writings preserved from the period prior to the invention of paper is surprisingly small.

Even if we allow for lost writings known from early catalogues and stray quotations, the conclusion seems warranted that up to the invention of paper the available writing materials put severe limitations on the volume of texts that were transmitted from, generation to generation.

The invention of paper, which made books both cheaper and handier, was followed during the second century and beyond by a rapid and sizable expansion of the body of literature: extensive commentaries and new *genres* of literature, especially lyrical poetry and various forms of expository prose. The very volume of such writings soon called forth the emergence of the literary anthology, which in turn gave birth to literary criticism. While such works remained the domain of the élite of Confucian gentlemen and bureaucrats, other less esteemed professional groups such as medical men, military officers, Daoist priests and Buddhist monks now also acquired a quickly expanding written tradition of their own.

However, the most drastic change brought about by the invention of paper may well have been of a completely different order. Up to the invention of paper, the actual writing down of texts was primarily the laborious task of highly specialized but lowly regarded clerks. Following the invention of paper, the gentleman-author wrote down his own compositions in his own hand, and soon calligraphy was a highly regarded and widely practised art among the élite. Starting from the second century, the ability to compose and write, poetry and prose increasingly became the essential skill of a gentleman and the yardstick by which his moral worth was assessed. This development culminated in the institutionalization of the Chinese examination system.

All this endowed the institution of literature with a central role in the high culture of traditional China, a role without parallel in any other civilization. It was further strengthened by the early establishment of a standard written language, which even preceded the invention of paper by a few centuries, and a writing system which ignored dialectal variations in pronunciation or changes of pronunciation through time.

### Early historical writings

During the centuries up to the establishment of the unified empire by the short-lived Qin dynasty (221–208 bc), we find two preferred modes of history writing, both of which abhorred the narrative: one dominant mode was the chronicle, another mode consisted of collections of princely pronouncements and court discussions. The only chronicle preserved from this period is the *Chunqiu* or *Annals of Spring and Autumn*, a chronologically arranged series of disconnected entries, covering the years 722–479 bc, and originating from the principality of Lu. According to later legend, this chronicle was written (or at least revised) by Confucius himself, who was believed to have expressed his approval or disapproval of each separate incident by his careful selection of words. The legend highlights a central concern of traditional Chinese historiography: the historiographer has to record each separate moral fact in fitting terms, because only in this way can history fulfil its function as a guide to future generations. History which swerves but the tiniest fraction from fact becomes fiction which by its very nature can only be misleading. Other states apart from Lu also compiled chronicles and many of these served as the source materials for Sima Qian (145/135–87 bc), when he compiled his *Shiji* or *Records of the Historian*, the first general history of China.

The model for the second dominant mode of historiography, the collection of recorded speeches, was provided by one of the Confucian Classics, the *Shujing* or *Book of Documents*.

The two main representatives of this mode are the *Guoyu* or *Conversations of the States* and the *Zhanguo ce* or *Strategies of the Warring States*. The *Guoyu* deals with roughly the same period as the *Chunqiu*, whereas the second work derives its materials from the period of the fifth to third centuries bc. Both works are collections of separate speeches and discussions, held at the courts of the major feudal states, the historical reliability of which is rather low as most of the items are pious reconstructions of a much later date. Many of the items in the *Zhanguo ce* possibly even originate from school exercises in persuasive rhetoric on hypothetical subjects. The same pious urge to reconstruct the lost words of the ancient sages has swelled not only the bulk of these two works but of many other early works as well.

The major example of narrative historiography from these early centuries is the *Zhuo zhuan* or *Tradition of Zuo*. This prose work, dating from the fourth or third century bc, provides a detailed and lively account of the many wars of the seventh to fifth centuries bc.

These various strands of historiography were brought together in Sima Qian's *Shiji*, which was compiled on the basis of existing documents and oral traditions. Apart from chronological annals, genealogies and tables, the *Shiji* also contains 'Treatises' (each dealing with a specific aspect of administration), and no less than seventy books of 'Exemplary Traditions'. Usually, this last section is referred to as the 'Biographies', since the majority of chapters are dedicated to prominent historical personalities, but the *Liezhuan* section also contains chapters on China's relations

with the outside world. All later compilers of dynastic histories have followed the model of Sima Qian's *Shiji*, and this fourfold division of materials into annals, tables, treatises and biographies has remained the standard right up to the early twentieth century.

Historiography was a vital government concern. The Tang central government eventually established a historiographical agency, which was charged both with the compilation of the histories of preceding dynasties and with preparing the materials for a future history of the Tang itself. While Sima Qian still had based part of his work on oral traditions, later histories increasingly depended on pre-existing archival materials, which were rather excerpted than summarized or analysed. Legendary materials, if included at all, were trimmed as far as possible into the features of bare historical fact. Of orally transmitted myths and sagas (and possibly epic poetry, the existence of which is very doubtful) only disconnected fragments found their way into the historical record.

### Early philosophical writings

While history recorded the facts of political action, philosophical and expository writings discussed the way in which man should behave in order to achieve peace and prosperity.

A very early form of philosophical writing is represented by the *Lunyu* or *Analects*. This slim volume collects a great number of disconnected sayings of Confucius (died 479 bc) and his immediate disciples, recorded without any context. The collection probably took shape during the two or three generations following the death of the Master. While it is impossible to vouch for the verbatim veracity of each and every utterance which is credited to the Master, the desire to capture the *Wortlaut* of the Master imparts the *Lunyu* with a liveliness all of its own. An example of the further development of the verbatim record of actual dialogues is offered by the *Mengzi* of Mencius. This work contains the discussions of the Confucian philosopher Meng Ke (372–289 bc) with princes of his time, philosophical rivals and disciples. In this work, the discussions are far more extensive, allowing for the sustained development of an argument; moreover, the compilers of the collection have clearly attempted to group discussions and pronouncements on related topics together in separate books.

One further step pious disciples could take was to leave out the objections raised by their master's adversaries and arrange his pronouncements on a given topic in a more or less logical sequence, resulting in 'essays' that at times display internal inconsistencies.

This may well be the way in which for example many of the chapters of the *Xunzi* or *Master Xun*, a work purporting to transmit the teachings of the Confucian philosopher Xun Qing (298–238 bc), came into being. For the real philosophical essay we have to wait until well into the third century bc, with thinkers like the legalist philosopher Han Fei. The art of the essay eventually would be brought to perfection by the sceptic philosopher Wang Chong (ad 27–c. ad 97) in his *Lun heng* or *Balance of Opinions*, in which he attacked many of the prejudices and superstitions of his age in forceful and uninhibited language.

The extensive record of actual conversations might also have stimulated the development of the fictive dialogue as a mode of philosophical discourse. However, the basic distrust of all forms of fiction prevented nearly all Chinese philosophers from following this route. The only philosophical work to explore with gusto all the

possibilities of the fictive dialogue is the *Zhuangzi* or *Master Zhuang*, which combines the teachings of the relativistic Daoist mystic Zhuang Zhou (369–286 bc) with a host of heterogeneous materials.

Among the philosophical writings of this period the *Zhuangzi* easily stands out for its pre-eminently literary qualities. The relativity of any fixed judgement and the transitivity of all forms of existence are argued in a 'potpourri' of technical treatises, hilarious anecdotes and humorous fictive dialogues.

While the overwhelming majority of philosophical writings are in prose, gnomic poetry further contributed to the variety and richness of its discourse. The best-known example of this type of writing, the *Daodejing* or *Book of the Way and its Virtue*, is commonly attributed to Laozi or the Old Master (traditionally sixth century bc), but the written text of the *Daodejing* may be as late as the third century bc. The *Daodejing* consists of a great number of very brief chapters, which often try to formulate a contradictory truth in a few lines of verse. Verse passages are also found in other philosophical writings, such as the *Xunzi* and the *Zhuangzi*. However, such gnomic poetry never resulted in the emergence of a didactic poetry of epic proportions. Prose remained the favourite medium for all manner of expository writing.

It should be stressed that virtually all pre-Qin philosophical texts have been re-collected (and sometimes even 'reconstructed') in early Han times, so that we always have to be aware of the possibility of Han time editing – at least as far as the standardization of language and orthography are concerned. While pre-Qin prose texts occasionally still show some signs of dialect, influences on grammar and vocabulary, they all acquired a uniform orthography during the Han. As of the Han dynasty, a standard language and standard script were employed through the extent of the empire. This standard written language would remain in use for 2,000 years, whatever the changes in the vernacular idiom, as the only acceptable medium for serious Literature, both prose and poetry.

### Early poetry

In contrast to the preserved writings of later ages, poetry occupies a decidedly minor position in the *corpus* of the earliest literature. The *Shijing* or 'Book of Songs' was memorized by members of the élite, but the *genre* was not continued beyond the seventh century bc.

For the re-emergence of poetry, one has to wait a few centuries and turn to the southern state of Chu (present-day Hubei and Hunan) at the turn of the fourth to the third century bc. There emerged a completely new *genre* of poetry which for its form and imagery drew heavily on the shamanistic chants of the region. The emergence of this new poetry is associated with the name of Qu Yuan (c. 330–c. 278 bc). According to his biography in the *Shiji*, Qu Yuan was a loyal minister, who was mistrusted and finally exiled by the King of Chu. Having given vent to his frustration in his poems, Qu Yuan thereupon committed suicide by drowning himself. Unfortunately, his biography may well be a reconstruction of his life on the basis of the poems attributed to him, especially *Lisao* or 'Encountering Sorrow'.

This long poem (by Chinese standards: 374 lines) described the estrangement between a loyal servant to the throne (the speaker of the poem) and a king who does not appreciate his true worth but listens to slander. Historical allegory, vegetal and animal imagery, and the conceit of the shaman's journey through space are all drawn upon to enhance the emotional intensity of this complaint. Qu Yuan's *Lisao* established for centuries 'the official's complaint' as a central topic of Chinese poetry.

Such poems on the official's complaint are prayers for royal recognition, and they occupy a position which may be comparable to that of religious poetry in many other cultures. In the following centuries the *Lisao* engendered a host of imitations. Together with some other materials these poems were included in an early second-century ad collection which is known as the *Chuci* or *Songs of the South*.

Also, during the third century bc, another *genre* of poetry emerged which is known by the name of *fu* or rhapsody. This *genre* drew on the one hand on the *Lisao* -style poetry for some of its formal features, and on the other hand on the rhetorics of persuasive speech, as represented by the *Zhanguo ce*. It sought its strength in the minute description of objects, actions or emotions by exploiting all the resources of the language – especially its lexicon – to the extent that it has been characterized as enumerative rather than descriptive poetry.

It was to become the dominant form of court poetry during the Han dynasty: exuberant descriptions of impressive subjects like the emperor's hunting preserve, imperial sacrifices and the grandiose scenery of the Han capitals. Recreating in words an even more perfect replica of these microcosmic representations of the world (hunting, preserves, capitals), these poets contributed in their own specific way to the emperor's ordering of the universe.

### The Classics, the histories and the philosophers

Traditional Chinese bibliography, as represented in the bibliographical treatise in the *Suishu* or *Book of the Sui*, the standard history of the short-lived Sui dynasty (589–618), divides the *corpus* of Chinese writing into four main categories: the Confucian Classics, the Histories, the Philosophers and the Collections, while listing the Daoist and Buddhist scriptures in appendices. The Classics are a group of historical, philosophical and ritual texts, which were accorded special veneration on the basis of their (presumed) ancient origins. As the embodiment of the words and deeds of the perfect sages they were believed to provide the ultimate models for perfect behaviour and expression. As such they were the object of special government care. In ad 175 the complete text of the Classics was inscribed on stone slabs, and after the use of paper had become general, 'rubblings' were made that allowed students to obtain a faultless copy.

The Classics were a basically closed group of texts. If this section of bibliographies continued to expand, it was because of the endless stream of voluminous exegetical writings devoted to them from the second century ad onward. In the early seventh century the Tang court ordered the compilation of huge subcommentaries, which in a crowning exegetical effort set out to prove the total unity of all the Classics.

As regards the category of the philosophers, in general, philosophical discourse increasingly adopted other modes of writing, such as short essays and letters, and the *corpus* grew especially by the continuous addition of new commentaries to the old texts. Texts in military science and medical treatises were also put under this heading.

The compilation of histories continued as dynasties rose and fell. For the Later Han (ad 25–220) and the Three Kingdoms period (ad 220–265) two dynastic histories achieved lasting success. Numerous less successful attempts were made to chronicle the history of the succeeding short-lived dynasties; but eventually these merely served as the materials for the series of dynastic histories which were compiled under the auspices of the early Tang dynasty. Probably as a reaction to this

far-reaching government involvement in historiography, Liu Zhiji (661–621) wrote his *Shitong* or *Principles of Historiography*, China's first systematic inquiry into the objectives and methods of the historian's craft, in which its author strongly reasserted as the historian's duty the unprejudiced judgement of events.

The second century and beyond also witnessed, at first as a minor and private branch of historiography, the gradual growth of a literature of anecdotes and miracle tales, focusing on extraordinary events in the lives of individuals, at times from an interest in gossip and rumour, or at other times in order to prove the existence of gods and ghosts, or reincarnation.

Eventually, but only in the eighth century, the tradition would give rise to the origin of a truly fictional short story in China.

### The Collections

The Collections constituted a completely new departure in Chinese literature of the second century and beyond. As the invention of paper greatly facilitated the very act of writing and the reproduction of texts, the public and private papers, both prose and poetry, of individual authors came to be gathered in *bieji* or 'separate collections', which gained a wide circulation. The vitality of this branch of literature is amply demonstrated by the sheer volume of original writings which still survive.

The prose writings gathered in an individual's collection are of many kinds but primarily consist of the various *genres* of expository prose composed by the author in a bureaucratic capacity. Traditional Chinese literary criticism distinguished many *genres* of official prose; most of these *genres* were primarily distinguished by their function. Even letters are usually of a public nature. Although some texts, such as funerary writings, occasionally contain a more personal note, it should be borne in mind that they all had to fulfil a public function in a highly bureaucratized and ritualized society.

Most of the prose texts gathered in these collections are rather short. Over the centuries the artistic aspect came to be stressed more and more, notably the employment of the parallelistic style – a figure of speech which prescribed that two paired sentences share the same semantic and syntactic patterns but express an opposite meaning, and which is eminently suited to the monosyllabic nature of classical Chinese. Complete texts came to be written in pairs of parallel lines, the authors competing in their ingenious combinations of antithetic phrases and allusions. In the literary 'salons', which were an important aspect of fifth to seventh century court life, aristocrats dazzled each other by the brilliant display of their gorgeous prose compositions.

In poetry, the *fu* continued to be a highly respected and widely practised *genre*, and it increased its range as it also came to accommodate a lyrical and an expository mode of writing. However, the second century also saw the emergence of a new *genre* of poetry, the *shi*, which was much simpler in form and was primarily lyrical in nature. It soon became the preferred medium for personal expression. *Shi* poetry originated in popular song of the time, but is distinguished by a greater formal regularity, and unlike popular songs, it was both occasional and personal. The *genre* firmly established itself within the central tradition of Chinese literature when it was taken up by some members of the highest elite in the third century ad. The range of themes treated in *shi* poetry constantly widened from the joys of court life and complaints about exclusion, from power to the personal expression of existential anxiety, and the use of historical themes as an indirect way to criticize the present.

Poets of the early fourth century tried to use the *shi* form for the expression of their mystical experiences. Tao Yuanming (365–427) became China's first nature poet because of his extended descriptions of the mountainous scenery of southeastern China.

The *shi* poetry of the succeeding centuries was dominated by the 'palace-style', practised in literary salons by courtiers who luxuriated in the detailed descriptions of scenes and objects from palace life. These same centuries also witnessed a growing awareness, stimulated by the knowledge of Sanskrit, of the tonal qualities of the Chinese language and the euphuistic possibilities of their patterned use in poetry. Rules for the use of word-tones in poetry came to be formulated; which combined with prescriptions for the use of parallel couplets gave rise to the so-called 'modern poetry' of the eighth century and beyond.

The rapidly expanding volume of creative writings soon gave rise to the phenomenon of the anthology, which selected the finest examples of each *genre* as examples for students.

In the sixth century, authoritative anthologies of prose and poetry of the second to fifth centuries were eventually compiled. As selection implies discrimination, the same centuries also saw a remarkable development in literary theory and criticism. The crowning achievement in this field was the *Wenxin diaolong* or *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, by Liu Xie (died c. 520). This work in fifty chapters is an encyclopedic treatment of the origin of writings, the various *genres* of literature and their stylistic features.

### Daoist and Buddhist scriptures

The second century ad also saw the still very simple beginnings of the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, at first in a highly vernacular style far removed from the classical written language. In a later phase, from c. ad 400 onward, by far the greatest majority of translated scriptures derive from court-sponsored translation projects, in which foreign monks, competent interpreters and accomplished scholars co-operated in producing reliable and readable renditions of Indian originals. In view of the enormous linguistic and cultural barriers involved, this huge translation activity has no doubt been one of the greatest achievements of medieval Chinese culture. As Buddhism came to enjoy both elite patronage and popular support, the translated *sūtras* were soon accompanied by a voluminous literature of commentaries and treatises; also Chinese *sūtras* appeared.

Partially in reaction to the spread of Buddhism, religious Daoism also acquired an extensive literature of revelations, scriptures, talismans, commentaries, treatises and rituals.

Again, court sponsorship often played an important role in the collection, editing and preservation of the surviving texts.

Buddhism, in specifically Chinese forms of expression, became an integral part of Chinese culture. Many Buddhist motifs and plots were incorporated in popular culture and would eventually emerge in the drama and vernacular fiction of the last few dynasties.

Buddhist materials abound in the collections of anecdotes and miraculous tales. On the other hand, one is struck by the extent to which Buddhist discourse developed in a sphere of its own and how little influence it exerted on the classical tradition of Chinese literature, even during the heyday of Buddhist influence in China in the fourth to seventh centuries.

The seventh century still witnessed a high-point in translation activities upon the return from India of the scholarly monk Xuanzang (602–664). The eighth century, however, not only saw the rise of a vernacular narrative tradition that was heavily indebted to Buddhism for many of its popular themes but also saw the beginnings among élite intellectuals of a xenophobic aversion to all foreign imports – and Buddhism in China, for all its popularity among all layers of society, never lost the taint of being a ‘barbarian’ creed.

When in 589 the northern Sui dynasty ended centuries of political division by its conquest of the last of the southern dynasties, the Chen, the conquering emperor and the defeated emperor, brought face to face, were unable to communicate by word of mouth.

Yet the extent to which a single written language held sway throughout the whole Chinese world, and the extent to which literacy had permeated society can be gauged from the fact that the final campaign was preceded by the distribution of ten thousands of written leaflets in which the Sui listed the crimes of the Chen. Following the unification, the literature of the southern dynasties set the standard for the new empire. Even before that time, the finest poet of his age, Yu Xin (513–581), a southerner by birth and allegiance, was retained by northern courts when he arrived there as an ambassador. The centripetal forces of a common culture supported, thanks to paper, by a widely disseminated standard written language, maintained the ideal of union even through centuries of partition.

# GREEKS AND ROMANS

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 bc) in his treatise on *Politics* (1/2.2; 1253a) identified two features which distinguish humans from all other species, namely that they are 'civil beings' and 'beings which possess *Logos*'. This *Logos* in its two aspects of speaking and thinking was, according to Aristotle, that which set humans apart from animals, which enabled them to determine common standards and values, that is to bring to bear their civil being. This was the first time in the history of European thought that humans had been conceived as communicative beings and so clearly described as such. This interpretation on the part of the Greek philosopher marked the culmination of centuries of development which have bequeathed to human civilization numerous outstanding achievements, not least in the fields of poetry, rhetoric, philosophy and the sciences.

## Greek civilization after the Dark Ages

To understand the process by which the pillars of civilization developed in Ancient Greece, we must look back another 100 years or so from the transition between the epochs in 700 bc to the end of the Dark Ages. The latter epoch was a time of radical changes in patterns of civilization following the end of Greek society's first heyday, the so-called Mycenaean period, around 1200 bc. The surge of military and political power, the extensive long-distance trade links and the flourishing art and architecture which were characteristic features of this period were followed by a process of decline and stagnation that persisted until about 800 bc. Major centres like Mycenae, Tiryns and Pylos succumbed to the pressure of a wave of migration from the north. The mighty citadels were abandoned in favour of small village settlements. Linear B, the script used in Crete and Mycenae probably to serve exclusively the purposes of a relatively advanced network of palaces and the bureaucracy, was no longer needed in the circumstances and thus disappeared.

This was then a major turning-point, though it certainly did not represent a total 'break with civilization'. The Greek homeland, overrun by new tribes from the north, had by no means exhausted its potential. It maintained a high level of commercial links with the Greek colonies in Anatolia and certain trading centres in Syria and Phoenicia. It is here and in other places that the Greeks came into contact with representatives of the people who played a decisive role in spreading the highly developed civilization of Western Asia to the Aegean and the western Mediterranean, namely the Phoenicians. It is from them that the Greeks adopted an asset that was to provide a major impetus to the advancement of their civilization. It was a written consonantal alphabet, which they further improved through the addition of vowel signs.

## The emergence of Greek script

It is probably Greek traders who were the first to realize the enormous practical advantages offered by the written language when it came to book-keeping, compiling inventories and settling accounts in their dealings with the Phoenicians at places like Al Mina at the estuary of the Orontes. The earliest surviving evidence, inscriptions on everyday items like the Dipylon vase, the so-called 'Nestor's Cup', suggest the Greeks adopted this alphabet in the latter half of the eighth century bc.

In recent decades there has been frequent discussion of what significance the adoption of the script and its improvement by the Greeks had for the development of Greek civilization.

As to the specific character of Greek script, the interdisciplinary discussion between orientalists and classical philologists has shown that an overestimation of the innovative achievement of the Greek alphabet is misleading. The Phoenician consonantal script constitutes a complete alphabet just as much as the Greek script, even though the structural peculiarities of the Semitic languages allow it to dispense with vowel signs. This consonantal script is every bit as clear and unambiguous as the Greek 'complete alphabet' and may be placed on the same level as other writing systems which were based on West Semitic script, for example Aramaic and the Arabic script derived from it. The Greek written alphabet was of major importance to the subsequent development of civilization in the western hemisphere. In the seventh century bc it was adopted by the Etruscans. Whether they or the Cumaeans in southern Italy passed it on to the Romans is not clear. In the ninth century ad the two oldest Slavonic scripts, Glagolitic and Cyrillic, were developed from the Greek alphabet. Influenced by an ancient script (it is controversial whether this was Latin, Greek or Etruscan) there developed also Germanic runes, which were spread from the Black Sea to northern Europe.

In the western part of the Mediterranean the Phoenicians founded the rich and powerful city of Carthage which dominated the coasts of North Africa and southern Spain and the isles of Sicily and Sardinia. The inhabitants who spoke the Punic language and wrote the Phoenician alphabet had a literature limited to historical and geographical texts and works on agriculture. The most famous of them, that of Mago, was translated into Latin in Rome.

### The transition from spoken to written poetry

Though it owed its origins to practical everyday requirements, the latter half of the eighth century bc saw the Greek script taking on an extremely important cultural role, namely the written codification of epic poems. This was the beginning of the road from oral to written poetry, a development which left its unmistakable mark on Greek literature in the centuries that followed. It is only an apparent contradiction to speak of 'oral literature'. Firstly, the oral precursors of written poetry undoubtedly deserve to be regarded as literature. And secondly, even after the introduction of the script and the gradual transition to written literary *genres*, an intricate combination of orality and literality continued to determine the development of literature throughout antiquity. An attempt will be made below to trace the main stages of this transition.

Research initiated in the 1930s by the American scholar M. Parry has revealed the unmistakable impact made by the long-established oral cultivation of heroic poetry on the Homeric epics. It has not, however, been possible to prove that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* – in the forms we know them today – are the result of purely oral exercises dispensing with the written form. There is plenty of evidence to suggest an early stage of heroic verse perhaps going back as far as the Mycenaean period. It was an art form based on improvisation and an eloquent mastery of linguistic formulae and standard plots. The singer stood facing his audience and performed his work in ever new adaptations. This notwithstanding, there has been a growing consensus that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the sublime works which marked the culmination of this development, display such a grand configuration in general and

embody such an intricate web of associations in particular that they could not have been composed without the written form (see Chapter 10.1.4).

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* nevertheless stand in the tradition of the epic performance, a practice which reaches back far beyond them. The place of the improvising singer was now taken by the rhapsode, who performed written works from memory. Living for a time at the court of a nobleman, where they sung the glories of ancient times at banquets, the professional singers later joined the other demiurges, that is 'those who worked for the community', such as seers, heralds, carpenters and doctors, touring the *poleis* of ancient Greece. They performed in the market squares and at major religious festivals and were received enthusiastically by large crowds.

The considerable length of the works was consonant with the weight of the message.

The epos was intended not only to embellish and elevate life in general, but to allot each individual a place in the world at large and their own community which gave a meaning to their life in particular. To this one must add the broad horizons of the past which epic verse, as the 'collective memory', kept alive in people's minds. The epic poem passed on the standards and values of the community and was the conveyor of wisdom and all knowledge. At a time when the written language was still in the making or not common property, verse with its metre could be retained more easily and was used as a vehicle to pass on life and world perspectives, morals and customs, religious values and knowledge of all kinds. We would, of course, be failing to do justice to its ethical dimension were we to reduce epic poetry to this pragmatic function alone. It was not only an educational means of conveying knowledge and preserving values, but a singular artistic achievement in its own right.

### Written language in the Orient and the Ancient World

It is true to say of major elements of Greek literature (epos, lyric, verse, drama, rhetoric) that throughout antiquity they took a predominantly oral form of dissemination, though relying on a written form which had become indispensable for the purpose of composing and recording the texts. For all the élitism of an educated upper stratum which clearly obtained here too in certain fields, it should be borne in mind that there was a fundamental distinction from the early Oriental civilizations. Since it catered primarily for everyday requirements, written language in Greek society could not share the exclusivity that was its most salient feature in the early civilizations of western Asia. The Greeks did not know the special status accorded to writers in the palaces and temples of Egypt, Summer and Akkad who, as executors of administrative functions and religious rituals and pillars of a system of rule embedded in profoundly hierarchical structures, served to preserve these structures and make them as impenetrable as possible to outsiders.

The use of the written language as a means of communication in the early Greek *polis* was attended from the outset by a democratic potential that was able to develop to the full in the *polis* democracy of the fifth century bc. Even before this, in the seventh and sixth centuries bc, substantially modified social and political structures brought with them changes in the form of communication. As *polis* society was consolidated, the focus of attention moved increasingly from the *oikos*, the court of the nobleman or the farm of the free peasant, to the universal interests of the community, which became the most cherished cause. In the absence of a royal family along the lines of those ruling the Orient, the nobility were able to reinforce

their position as the leading forces. They further strengthened their dominant position in the council and the assembly. A number of the rituals practised by the nobility spread throughout the *poleis*. In the military field, the lone noble warrior was replaced by the hoplite phalanx, a closely ranked line made up of all citizens capable of supplying their own weapons. A major structural element of life in Greek society and the chief pattern of life among the male nobility was the *hetairia*.

### Lyric poetry as a new form of communication

These new developments were attended by new forms of literature which we would place under the general heading 'lyrical'. They all rely on dialogue between the performer/writer and his audience whose values are to be imbued with a new spirit. The variety of these new forms was such as to necessitate written composition. But the oral context remained, and public performance was for a long time the only way of conveying works to a wider audience, while the written form was employed merely as an aid to composition and to provide a documentary record of the final version.

The multitude of forms mirrored the varied social and cultural life that emerged at the time. Alongside the elegy (originally, a lament for the dead) and the iambic (originally, satirical verse) performed to a flute accompaniment, we have the choral ode and the *melos* (song for the solo performer). The last-mentioned, being performed to the lyre, is lyricism in the narrower, ancient sense of the word. One should further add the *skolion* (drinking song) and the epigram (originally, an inscription). The choice of *genre* depended on the various distinctive contexts for communication arising from the needs of society.

A growing requirement for a sense of community and insistent appeals to the citizens to join together meant the most prominent position was occupied by the elegy. The Ionian poet Callinus (around 675 bc) and the Spartan Tyrtaeus (seventh century bc) coupled it with an imploring call to fight and help save the threatened policy, whilst the Athenian statesman Solon used this form as an immediate expression of a new political philosophy designed to defuse the growing social tensions facing the strife-torn *polis* of Athens, to explain and justify certain maxims for the actions of its citizens.

It was likewise the needs of society that led to the emergence of the choral ode, a *genre* which owes its origins to the practice of rituals. An elemental combination of dance, song and flute *cithara* playing produced such different forms as the threnody (speech of lamentation for the dead), the paean (festive hymn in honour of Apollo) and the dithyramb (passionate choral hymn in honour of Dionysus).

That the lyrical mode relied to a great extent on the community is a fact that was profitably put to use in view of the way it contrasted with the means of articulating the thoughts and feelings of individuals in certain forms. Here it is first and foremost Archilochus (seventh century bc) who springs to mind. The son of an aristocrat and a slave, he lived the life of a mercenary. His position between the strata allowed him to take a critical attitude to the aristocracy's inherited code of values. Faced with the ups and downs of his eventful life, he made it his supreme maxim to face up boldly to inevitable change and to prove himself as it progressed.

That early works were completely dominated by their context is particularly clear when we look at the *melos*, lyricism in the narrower, ancient sense, which first saw the light of day around 600 bc in Mytilene on the island of Lesbos. As poets,

members of the aristocracy came to advocate the interests of a leading stratum which had adopted the patterns of life handed down by its ancestors. In Mytilene, which like other Greek *poleis* was witnessing fierce struggles between rival lines or nobility at the time, the *hetairia* provided an alliance for the fight and, at the same time, a major setting for social gatherings focusing on the symposium, or drinking party, as a lavishly cultivated form of sociability. This is the setting in which the works of Alcaeus (about 600 bc) took shape. The themes he chose for his exquisitely artistic songs were those on the minds of the people around him: the fight between the various lines of nobility and against the looming threat of a single nobleman, a tyrant usurping power; the heady mood of the party; the joys and tribulations of love. The purely male forms of *hetairia* had their female counterpart in certain forms of *thiasus*, a group or association worshipping a patron deity. It is this which provided the main background to the work of Sappho (after 650 bc), the leading female lyricist in the Greek language and a contemporary of Alcaeus. The Aphrodite cult united young women from aristocratic families up to the time of their marriage. As they lived together and Sappho instructed them in the nobility's way of life, in music and dance, there developed emotional and erotic relationships between the girls and their teacher, which Sappho reflects through her verse in a subtly differentiated manner.

The late resurgence of choral lyric poetry in the fifth century bc, as exemplified by Pindar (522–446 bc) and Bacchylides (c. 505–c. 450 bc), is associated in part with tyrants, but also with numerous cities and noblemen spread throughout the whole of the Greek world. They wrote songs to order, lauding the victors at the great pan-Hellenic games, as well as dithyrambs, anthems to the gods and paeans. Pindar in particular proclaimed with unbroken enthusiasm the long outdated ideals of the old aristocracy, but with such an exquisite mastery of his art that his writings have survived down the ages. It was a long, slow process before the written versions became widespread. An important step in this direction seems to have been taken in the latter half of the sixth century bc and to have been associated with the work of Theognis, a noble poet from Megara, who, not understanding the signs of democratization in the life of society, lamented the unfavourable times and clung to the aristocracy's old ideals. It is in his works that we find for the first time references to a poetic self-awareness with the expectation that his creative endeavours will become known in larger parts of the Greek world and live on to future generations. This suggests them being preserved in ways that involve the written form.

### The beginnings of prose

A new phenomenon in literary communication first appeared in the sixth century bc, namely prose in the sense of a written piece not complying with the rules of metre. If we consider that the metre of poetry originally served, among other things, as an aid to memory so that works of value could be preserved in the time before written language, it will be clear that prose necessarily depended on the written form. Here too, the form was not the chief motive, but an essential condition for the creation of new literary *genres*: folk tales, the beginnings of philosophy and science and the earliest forms of historiography.

In terms of content, the most salient feature of many of these new texts was the marked rationality of their argumentation, which relied on a discussion of the pros and cons of different views. The components which formed the sources of this rationality are numerous indeed. They include the lively debates in the political bodies of the *poleis*, the practice of recording the law in written acts of legislation (late

seventh century bc onwards) and the ample empirical fund arising from growing opportunities to compare different countries and peoples, political and constitutional structures.

The British social anthropologists J. Goody and I. Watt claimed that the written forms as such represented a necessary, if not of itself sufficient, condition for the new critical rationality. Not only did it facilitate an enormous growth in knowledge, since this could now be stored in a retrievable manner, but it actually embodied further potentialities for developing critical thought. And these were used to great effect in combination with other favourable factors existing in Greece.

It would go beyond the framework of this chapter to do more than mention in passing the multitude of forms present in early Greek prose. The epos was joined by such ancient narrative forms as the fairy tale, the short story, the fable and the legend. The early logographers (actually, 'prose writers') like Pherecydes of Syros, Acusilaus, Hecataeus, Hel-lanicus and others saw it as their task, in contrast to the overwhelmingly pan-Hellenic orientation of the epos, to deal with the local mythological inheritance which brought the development of a kind of local history writing.

The new forms of philosophical and scientific thought, which arose from the rapid social development and a broadening of the horizon, deviated into fundamental issues of nature's existence (see Chapter 1 and 10).

The beginnings of science and historiography likewise crucially depended on the written language.

### Communication through literature in the democratic *polis*

A major turning-point in the development of literary communication came with the emergence of *polis* democracy in the fifth century bc. It was manifested first of all in a rapid growth of literacy among Athenians from many different walks of life, including the lower strata. For democratic institutions (council, citizens' assembly, jury court, public offices) to function without the majority of *polis* citizens of all social stations being able to read and write was out of the question. At the same time, a clear distinction should be drawn between literary communication and spoken and written language as such in order to exclude any misunderstandings about the social breadth of the emergent reading public. In this, as in other periods of civilization, it needs to be remembered that the ability to read and write for practical purposes and the ability to read books are poles apart. From the end of the fifth century bc and especially in the fourth century bc, areas like historiography, philosophy and the sciences were entrusted solely to a limited circle who were able to read books and possessed a high standard of education.

These constraints, however, were certainly not the decisive factors influencing literary communication during the heyday of democracy. Two new forms of communication originating from this time constituted a new peak in the development of oral communication in ancient literature, namely the drama and rhetoric at its most advanced. Philosophy too, reaching large sections of the *polis* in the shape of the Attic enlightenment, produced with the sophist lecture oral forms of inestimable value. An inherent interaction between the spoken and the written form is characteristic of all three *genres*. The continuing importance of the oral performance relies almost invariably on the use of the written form in composing the texts.

All these new developments owed a great deal to the needs of the community of citizens and the spirit of democracy. As the predominant literary *genre* in this

period, drama had emerged from the religious and ritualistic institutions of a *polis* seeking its road to democracy.

Both tragedy and comedy owed their origin to the peasant cult of Dionysus, which played a central role in the life of Athens and other Greek *poleis*. In tragedy, the ritualistic elements combined with Homeric myth to form a coherent whole. Together with the words of the poet, music and dance constituted the foundations of a mimetic art form which once again did full justice to the oral traditions of Greek poetry. As in the epos before it, the rhythm gave rise to a form which made it possible to memorize the poet's words and possibly even lengthy sections of his works. This is one explanation of the high demands on the memory of an overwhelmingly hearing, but not reading, audience made by the tragic parodies in the comedies of Aristophanes. With Attic drama, an oral art form thus became the main instrument by which an entire society shaped its identity.

The practice of using choirs drawn from the public and actors to perform the plays necessitated a single written text which was only actually read to the extent that it was circulated along a limited number of people and later (in the fourth century bc) also became a historical document when 'official' copies were deposited in the state archives. It is easy to appreciate that the intermediate position between written composition and oral performance (originally each play was performed only once, and it was a slow process before the same work was staged for a second and further times, respectively in the demes of Attica) gave rise to an inherent tension in the course of composition and in the works which were produced as a result.

Tragedy and comedy played a paramount role in the intellectual life of the *polis*. An extremely flexible treatment of plots and motives, standards and values meant that the tragic poets and the myths of early Greece could be adapted at will to interpret whatever happened to be on the mind of the *polis* community at that moment. At a time of profound political upheaval, when old values and tenets were being lost, the options for new maxims, for the establishment of new standards and values were, so to speak, 'played through'.

It is not so much allusions to contemporary events (although these are also to be found) which constitute the background to these forms of redefining meaning as the existential state of society and individual, their interrelation and the changes it is undergoing at a time of accelerated historical development. Examples are the establishment of *polis* justice and democracy in Aeschylus (*Oresteia*), the relationship between the individual and society in Sophocles (*Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*) and the emergence of a new and largely individualistic morality and a secularized world view in Euripides. Although the works remained tied to ritual and religion throughout the century and beyond, their actual substance increasingly departed from the channels prescribed by the old *polis* religion. An art form emerged which was marked by growing autonomy and whose objectives were no longer necessarily connected with immediate concerns. In the fourth century bc, subjects of direct political relevance disappeared from the tragedy completely. Parallel to this, greater emphasis was placed on the written form, for Aristotle, to such an extent that the central importance of the drama was that it could be read while its performance became incidental. From the fourth century bc this was one of the ways in which an élitist form of literature crystallized out of what had until then been a largely homogenous *polis* culture.

Similar processes are to be observed in comedy. Whilst it was used by the great masters Eupolis, Cratinus and Aristophanes as one of the chief means of creating a sense of political and spiritual identity and as a vehicle to comment on the

contradictory political developments, comedy was reduced in the fourth century bc to parodizing myths and dealing with subjects from everyday life.

### Rhetoric as the art of communication

The oral form of communication was bolstered once again in the fifth century bc with the consolidation of the art of rhetoric. Having emerged from initial forms of a natural eloquence and first having been developed as an 'art' in Sicily, it soon found its home in Athens, the centre of *polis* democracy, where it was used to meet practical political requirements. Alongside the political speech (in the council and the citizens' assembly) and the speech in the courts, there developed the epideictic speech, a form employed at such occasions as funerals and the great pan-Hellenic festive gatherings. In the democratic *polis* rhetoric was used as an instrument to influence the views of the masses and a tool for opinion formation. For a society in which the fundamental democratic rights included an equal right to make a political speech (*isegoria*) and to any other form of public expression of opinion (*parrhesia*), the formulation of views and counterviews and the attainment of a sustainable consensus through debate were concerns of major importance.

The necessary rhetorical skills were imparted by teachers who, like the Sophist Gorgias (c. 485–c. 380 bc) travelled extensively through the Greek territories and gave instruction in return for considerable fees.

The Sophists, notably Gorgias, developed in the shape of rhetoric the first ever theory of linguistic communication. Gorgias described *Logos* as 'mighty ruler'. By way of persuasion based on rational argumentation and also irrational means using the magic of words, it enabled man to carry through what he regarded as right and proper. Being a pragmatist, Gorgias saw spreading rather than gaining knowledge as the object of rhetoric.

### The transition from oral to written philosophy

In the fifth century bc, philosophy itself became associated with forms of communication that had previously been alien to it. It reached a broader public than ever before, notably due to the activities of the Sophists, who employed both oral and written forms. The Sophists satisfied a need for practicable knowledge arising from democracy, not only as teachers of rhetoric, but also through instruction in politics, strategics and economics. Apart from these areas, we also find the later stages of the philosophy of nature.

The oral form played no small role in spreading philosophical ideas. Zeno, a pupil of Parmenides, is said to have given an oral presentation in Athens of a paper on the One and the Many and to have put it up for discussion. Apart from their expensive courses, the Sophists held lectures for a broader audience. The written form became considerably more widespread in the latter half of the fifth century bc with the appearance of various textbooks containing contributions by the Sophists and others on subjects such as architecture, urban construction, the graphic arts and technological aspects of the stage.

In the fourth century bc there was a fundamental change in the forms through which philosophy was communicated. The emergent schools of philosophy, notably the Platonic one and later the Aristotelian, sought initially to spread their knowledge among a chosen few, employing the oral form of instruction and a discussion which

presupposed a high degree of understanding on the part of the participants. Admittedly, both schools gave broad scope to the written form as well.

### The emergence of a book culture

The fifth and fourth centuries bc saw sweeping changes in the forms of communication, particularly with regard to the development of the written form. Commercial forms of book copying and trading appeared from the last third of the fifth century bc. They gave rise to what was initially a limited erudite circle who purchased and collected books on a larger scale. Nevertheless, there remained a wide gap between those who were capable of reading and writing for practical purposes and the much smaller number who were prepared and able to read books. Although the reception of works of literature by the 'lone reader' actually reached a socially relevant magnitude in the fourth century bc, this form must be considered for the whole of antiquity in conjunction with the continued presence of oral forms (theatre, recitation, lecture and so on).

A crucial period in the history of the written language and the book came in the Hellenistic Age, the period from the assumption of power by Alexander to the incorporation of Egypt into the Roman Empire. The rulers of the great Hellenistic empires turned their capital cities into centres of culture, building major libraries to house the works of early and Classical Greek literature. The most famous library with a stock of some 500,000 books in roll form (at its peak, with more than one million) was located in Alexandria, Egypt, while the town of Pergamon in Anatolia had a smaller one modelled on it. The librarians who worked there were outstanding scholars who have to their credit that they produced critical appraisals and annotated editions of the great works of Greek literature. It would have been impossible to amass such large collections without the existence of what even at that time was a relatively well-developed book trade.

### Types of communication in Rome

In Rome types of linguistic and literary communication, which had their origin in Greece, developed to a higher perfection. A new quality came about above all with regard to the greater radius of communication facilities. Through the development of major roads in Italy and later in the entire Roman Empire there arose the possibility of fast transport for military and commercial purposes, which could be used also for the communication of news. From the middle of the first century bc everyday official reports (*acta diurna*), an early kind of newspaper, were published in Rome and were sent to many parts of the empire. The production and circulation of books now developed to a far greater extent. The profession of publisher or bookseller had its origin in private forms of mutual support in copying books. For instance Atticus, the friend of Cicero (106–43 bc), originally duplicated only the manuscripts of the famous author, but later on produced books for commercial reasons too. The most famous names of Roman publishers are the Sosii, who published the works of Horace, and Trypho, the publisher of Martial and Quintilian. The publishing house in that time was a commercial enterprise, engaged in the copying and circulation of books, in contrast to private circulation of texts. Publication meant that the author released the texts to a wider public. We do not know of remuneration to authors for their intellectual property. From the sale of books only the publishers made money. Because everyone could make copies in unlimited numbers there was a great danger of the

rapid deterioration of the texts. In principle there existed the possibility of corrected second editions, but the author could not influence the subsequent fate of this edition in relation to the first one. There was no publishing right or copyright. Authors could not earn their living from their intellectual work by publishing books. If they were not well-to-do or did not earn their subsistence from teaching rhetoric or philosophy, they had to establish relationships of patronage to influential persons, which were very important for literary life in the Roman Republic as well as in the Roman Empire. This kind of relationship to persons such as Messala or Maecenas brought a public reputation as well as financial support to the author.

The primary form of publication was (similar to Greece) in most cases the oral performance.

From the Augustan period public readings (*recitationes*) became great events among the higher circles of society. Asinius Pollio, their initiator, was also the founder of the first public library of Rome. Later the emperors founded further libraries, which we can find also in many cities of the provinces. In the beginning, in Rome as in Greece, there was the book scroll. The codex, attested since the first century ad, which could be produced more cheaply and could be used more easily, step by step superseded the scroll, and at the same time the papyrus was replaced by parchment. In the fourth century ad the transcription of the texts from scroll to codex was completed.

Roman literature received vital stimuli from Greek Hellenism. The Roman comedy of Plautus (about 250–184 bc), and Terentius (about 190–159 bc) which was derived immediately from the Greek theatre, had a broad public from all strata. In first line, members of the lower strata, freedmen and immigrants ( Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Ennius, Plautus, Terence) created the basis of Roman poetry: comedy and above all epic (Naevius, Ennius) and tragedy (Naevius, Ennius, Pacuvius). A special province of the aristocrats was from the very beginning historiography. The Annals, which were developed on the basis of very old traditions (annual tablets of the Pontifices), first described the achievements of Roman politics in Greek (Fabius Pictor) for a Greek public, while later in Latin was created the beginnings of a specifically Roman historical awareness (Cato). In the later Roman Republic there was a documentary report by Caesar (100–44 bc) and a historical monography by Sallustius (86–35 bc) for the purposes of political competition. Immediately out of the needs of political life there also arose the great achievements of Roman rhetoric, which in theory as well as in practice Cicero led to its highest point. The master of oratory published his famous speeches for literary reception too. The philosophical treatises of Cicero contributed decisively to the introduction of Greek philosophy to Rome.

Roman poetry found its perfection in the late republic and Augustan time. There was a high degree of individualism in the neoteric movement, which was influenced by Hellenistic lyric. Poets such as Catullus (87–54 bc) and his friends made their love and the personal experience of their life the subject of their work, at the same time demanding a high standard of technical perfection. Turning away from the individualistic position and the 'l'art pour l'art' of this time the great poets of the Augustan period supported in their work the ideals of political renovation conceived by Augustus: Virgil (Vergilius, 70–19 bc) with the national epic *Aeneid*, Horace (65–8 bc) with his *Odes*, which were influenced by the early Greek lyric of Alcaeus. Horace was the master of satire too, a *genre* unknown to the Greeks. Another group of poets in Augustan time preserved a kind of distance from the political life: the poets of Roman love elegy (Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid), who continued to cultivate the personal inner life of man. The most important historian of the Augustan time was

Livy (Livius, 59–17 bc), who praised the old Roman virtue as the basis of Roman world power.

Rhetoric found a new position between orality and literality in the period of the Roman Empire. Oratory lost its practical value as an instrument to establish political consensus, because the institutions of the republic had disappeared. But nevertheless rhetoric strongly influenced the development of literature in prose and poetry, as we can see in the works of historiography (Tacitus), tragedy (Seneca) and epic (Lucan). We find a critical position towards the social problems of the time in the satires of Juvenal and Persius, in the epigrams of Martial, the fables of Phaedrus and the novels of Petronius and Apuleius. Roman historiography culminated in the work of Tacitus (ad 55–120), who was a master of psychological analysis and description. Following this tradition in the fourth century ad there was also Ammianus Marcellinus.,

A late flourishing of Greek literature can be observed from the second century ad. Greek classicism meant nostalgia with regard to the great past of Greece. The authors of the so-called Second Sophistry (Dio Prusanus, Aelius Aristides) connected the rhetorical with the philosophical tradition. We find remarkable works of historiography (Diodorus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Appian, Arrian). Philosophy cultivated above all the tradition of Platonism and Stoicism (Plutarch, Epictetus). There was created an essentially new form of Platonism, the Neoplatonism of Plotinus (ad 204–270). The novel, which had its origin already in Hellenistic time, marked by its broad public of readers a new step in the development from orality to literality (Chariton, Heliodorus, Longus). Narrative prose meant a great advance in the development of the 'lone reader'. We observe a last great period in sciences (Strabo, Ptolemaeus) and medicine (Galen).

At the time of the beginning of social and political crises in the Roman Empire there arose Christian literature. Authors such as Minucius Felix and Lactantius tried to create a synthesis of ancient pagan culture and Christianity. In the transition from the fourth to the fifth century ad Augustine (ad 354–430) marked the summit of Latin Christian literature, which fundamentally influenced the culture of the Middle Ages. Since the second centuries ad, Greek authors had contributed fundamentally to the development of Christian literature (Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius). Ambrose (ad 333/4–397) created a new *genre* of poetry, the 'Christian hymn'. Hymns were an essential new form of communication for the broad masses of Christian people.

Besides the Christian literature there existed even in late antiquity a pagan literature, which was above all concentrated on the traditions of Roman history and culture. Claudian (born c. ad 375), the last great Roman poet, admired the achievements and values of the Roman past and committed himself to a kind of panegyric court poetry. Prose literature was devoted to the collection of ancient knowledge in encyclopedias and compendia (Martianus Capella, Cassiodorus). The philosopher Boethius (about ad 480–524) wrote translations and commentaries of works of classical Greek philosophy and science and treatises on philosophical and mathematical problems. The sources of Roman law were combined in the great *Corpus Juris Civilis*, the important collection ordered by the emperor Justinian (ad 482–565).

## Byzantine literature

In Byzantine language and literature the division into an elevated and a popular branch, already underway a long time before, became more pronounced. Besides the works of official historiography there existed popular chronicles destined for a broader public of readers.

Poetry had an outstanding position in epigrams and hymns. Heroic epics and romances of chivalry, written in the vernacular language and influenced by western Europe led to modern Greek literature. A new historically important *genre* developed in Greek as well as in Latin: hagiography, the biography of saints. Acts of martyrs and biographies described the exemplary life of martyrs and saints. These works offer a very interesting picture of the life of their times in the various strata of society.

# AFRICA

Linguistic studies, *sensu lato*, play a relatively large, if sometimes controversial, part in investigations of the African past between c. 700 bc and c. ad 700. The methodological problems are considerable, but also of interest in themselves, because we are often dealing with the interface between contemporary languages written and unwritten, and also because historical linguistic studies of unwritten languages have been seen as offering a viable complement to the very incomplete archaeological data currently available. There is thus a very great variety in the ways in which studies of writing and language contribute to our understanding of African history at this time.

Egypt and North Africa are the areas where literacy at this period was most developed and widespread. Particularly in the former, the excellent arid conditions of preservation have ensured the survival of a great bulk of ancient documents, including many domestic and administrative ephemera of types virtually unknown elsewhere. Egypt thus stands out, not only from other parts of Africa but also from contemporary circum-Mediterranean literate societies, in the detailed and varied historical information that is available from documentary sources. Also informative is the way in which particular languages and scripts were used for different purposes in the various strata of Egyptian society. A comparable situation, less comprehensively documented, prevailed in most parts of North Africa.

Also represented in the documents that have survived on archaeological sites in Egypt are literary works which comprise one of our main sources of information about the intellectual life of the times. Here, of course, many works are extant which have not survived in contemporary manuscripts but as later copies: they include philosophical and religious works, poems, plays, political speeches and tracts, histories, geographies and varied technical treatises. Such Egyptian compositions as Ptolemy's *Geography* and the anonymous *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* give an indication of their range. For lasting significance, pride of place should perhaps go to Augustine's writings during the early fifth century ad in what is now eastern Algeria.

Particular interest attaches to the use which may be made of unwritten language in historical reconstruction. In the absence of written material from the past, all reconstructions of earlier forms must be based on recent observations. Through such research, including the study of distributions, sound-shifts, borrowings and the like, it is possible to reconstruct with some confidence 'family trees' of language development and to recognize loan words which have been borrowed by one language from another – a situation which most frequently arose in conjunction with cultural innovations to which the words in question related.

In sub-Saharan Africa, attempts to employ linguistic data in reconstructions of prehistory have been concentrated in the eastern and southern regions. In Ethiopia, the Horn and East Africa the languages primarily involved belong to the Afro-Asiatic and Nilo-Saharan families. At the period relevant to this chapter, interest centres on the Cushitic branch of Afro-Asiatic and its relationships both with Semitic (also Afro-Asiatic) and with Nilotic (a branch of Nilo-Saharan). While the Cushitic languages are believed to have been spoken for a very long time both in Ethiopia and in the Horn, Semitic is seen as having been introduced around the first half of the first millennium bc. At some stage, which has not been accurately determined, Cushitic expanded southwards into East Africa, where its speakers were in contact with other people who spoke forms of Nilotic. Attempts have been made to link these early East African Cushitic-speaking and Nilotic-speaking populations with certain herding peoples who

are attested in the region's archaeological record from the third or second millennia bc onwards, but the results of these speculations have attracted considerable controversy. It is, however, noteworthy that linguistic research provides strong indications that the early East African farming peoples were cultivators as well as herders, a feature which has not yet been confirmed archaeologically.

Further to the south, interest has centered on the extremely wide distribution of the closely interrelated Bantu subdivision of the Niger-Congo language family. Bantu languages are spoken today from Cameroon to southern Kenya and through almost the whole of Africa between and to the south of those countries except for the south-western area where most pre-colonial inhabitants were Khoisan-speakers. There is general agreement among linguistics that the Bantu languages must have developed from a common ancestral form within the comparatively recent past. The ancestral language was presumably spoken in or close to the north-western corner of the modern Bantu zone. In this largely forested area, the diversity of the recent languages suggests a longer period of development than among the more uniform dialects of the savannahs to the east and south. It is hardly surprising that historians have inquired whether the process of the Bantu language dispersal may have been in some way connected with the introduction of metallurgy, herding and cultivation to this same general area. With the exception of Kiswahili, Bantu languages were not committed to writing until comparatively recent times.

The Khoisan languages are today spoken by small numbers of people, but were significantly more widespread prior to the nineteenth century ad. They were primarily the languages of the hunters and herders who inhabited the interior and western parts of southern Africa beyond the agricultural areas that were settled by metal-using farming peoples. It is reasonable to suppose that, before the expansion of the latter during the earliest centuries ad, Khoisan languages had been more widespread; this view is supported by numerous Khoisan words and sounds that have been borrowed into southern Bantu speech.

Many parts of Africa have long had a highly developed oral literature. Language itself is a valuable repository of historical information, if only it can be extracted. There are, however, dangers in considering history in wholly linguistic terms. Linguistic terminology is just a means of referring to language groupings or forms. It should not be extended uncritically to refer to human populations which are primarily defined in other ways.

# THE AMERICAS

In the New World writing was found only in the Mesoamerican culture area. With respect to its subject matter, techniques and social context, the situation is not entirely clear for the period in question because of the limitations of archaeological data and inference. We will begin by describing the situation at the time of the Spanish Conquest, among the most complexly organized Mesoamerican people, the Aztecs. The Aztec writing system was a combination of ideographs, some phonetic symbols, in the form of rebus writing and pictographs. Writing was brush-painted on paper made from the inner bark of the *Amatle*, a fig tree.

Long strips of bark were taken from the tree, the fibres meshed by pounding with a special tool, covered with plaster and brush-painted in polychrome. The strips were folded in sections like an accordion and the book was bound with a wooden cover. Some of the books were sacred almanacs, calendars used for prophecy, and called *Tonalpohualli*. These prophecies were delivered by priests to individuals or groups, and the prophecy used to make decisions as to the timing of birth, funeral and marriage ceremonies, or to the planning of major activities. Other books were kept by accountants to record taxes, some were historical documents and provided information on dynastic succession, genealogical relationships and the activities and deeds of rulers. Finally, writing was also used for legal purposes, titles to land or buildings and in courts to record legal cases, including the names of litigants, the name of the judge and the results of the deliberations.

Writing was also inscribed in stone on public monuments, primarily for political reasons, and the inscriptions included a combination of religious and political icons as well as the written message. In summary then, writing among the Aztecs was limited in subject matter, the techniques included writing on both durable and perishable materials, in general served the interest of the ruling class, and had strongly political content and purpose.

Literacy among the Aztecs then was the province of the upper class of Aztec society, served to consolidate class membership, and had a limited number of functions.

To what extent these patterns applied to the time period dealt with here is a question. The Aztec was the largest political system to evolve in Mesoamerica and its capital Tenochtitlan was the most urbanized and largest urban community in the history of the culture area. One would expect, therefore, that writing would have played a more expanded role than in the smaller and less urban states and chiefdoms of the Classic period.

The most detailed and extensive information we have on the Mesoamerican writing system from our period is from the Maya Lowlands. While no books have definitely been found in that region dating from this time period, because of the problem of preservation, a few badly decomposed remains found in Maya burials suggest the presence of books somewhat like the Aztec ones in Classic times. In all probability these books were used, as among the Aztecs, for divination, using the sacred calendar. We know the calendar was used by the Maya at the time of the Spanish Conquest and that books were also used for the recording of royal genealogies. Along with the evidence of these functions of writing among the Maya of the sixteenth century, we also have evidence that tables of astronomical data, particularly data recording the movements of Venus and the Moon, were found in books.

A massive corpus of information exists on the nature and uses of Maya writing and subject matter, however, from the inscriptions found in durable materials, either inscribed in stone on walls of temples and houses or on special monuments called stelae, or painted in murals in these buildings or as scenes on pottery vessels. Maya writing was more evolved than that of the Aztec in the sense that it contained many more phonetic elements and was essentially and basically a phonetic system. It was syllabic rather than alphabetical and the number of glyphic elements were considerable and hence inscriptions are more difficult to decipher. Subject matter on the public monuments is very clearly political in nature and, combined with the iconography represented in sculpture, had as its major purpose the recording of the life crisis events of kings and to a certain extent their exploits. Much of what we find on Maya monuments is clearly meant as political propaganda and must be read with considerable caution. Occasionally the focus of the inscription is the military successes of kings, very often involving the capture and the sacrifice of people of high rank from neighbouring states, either warriors, nobles or even kings. While actual conquest is sometimes claimed this evidence must be evaluated against confirming evidence of another type because of the propaganda aspects of public Maya writing. Because of the limited subject matter of Maya writing and the political purposes of it, the use of the historical record to understand Maya culture and its development can be used but always with extreme caution.

The purpose of writing and its nature seems to have been much the same over most of Mesoamerica at this time, that is, on the Gulf Coast, in highland Guatemala and highland Oaxaca, but the corpus of material is much smaller than that pertaining to the Lowland Maya.

We have no direct evidence relating to literacy in Mesoamerican society during the Classic Period. Some architectural remains in a number of Maya sites suggest that there were special schools in the centres for the noble class, somewhat comparable to the Aztec *Calmeacac*. In all probability there were also rural schools among the Lowland Maya somewhat comparable to the Aztec *Telpochcalli*. What we suspect is that general elements of iconography, expressed in public monuments in Classic Maya centres, were understood by virtually the entire population, otherwise their public expression makes little sense. Their purpose is to constantly remind the subjects of the Maya kings of the unusually high status and political and religious privileges of the ruler and of other high ranking individuals. A full understanding of the writing system, however, was probably limited to a very small percentage of the population of a Classic Maya realm, probably less than 5 per cent and including only the adult males of the noble class.

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## CHAPTER 5

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