



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE STORY  
OF THE GREEKS

Helene A. Guerber

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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# The Story of the Greeks

BY  
H. A. GRUEBER





THESEUS AND THE MINOTAUR.

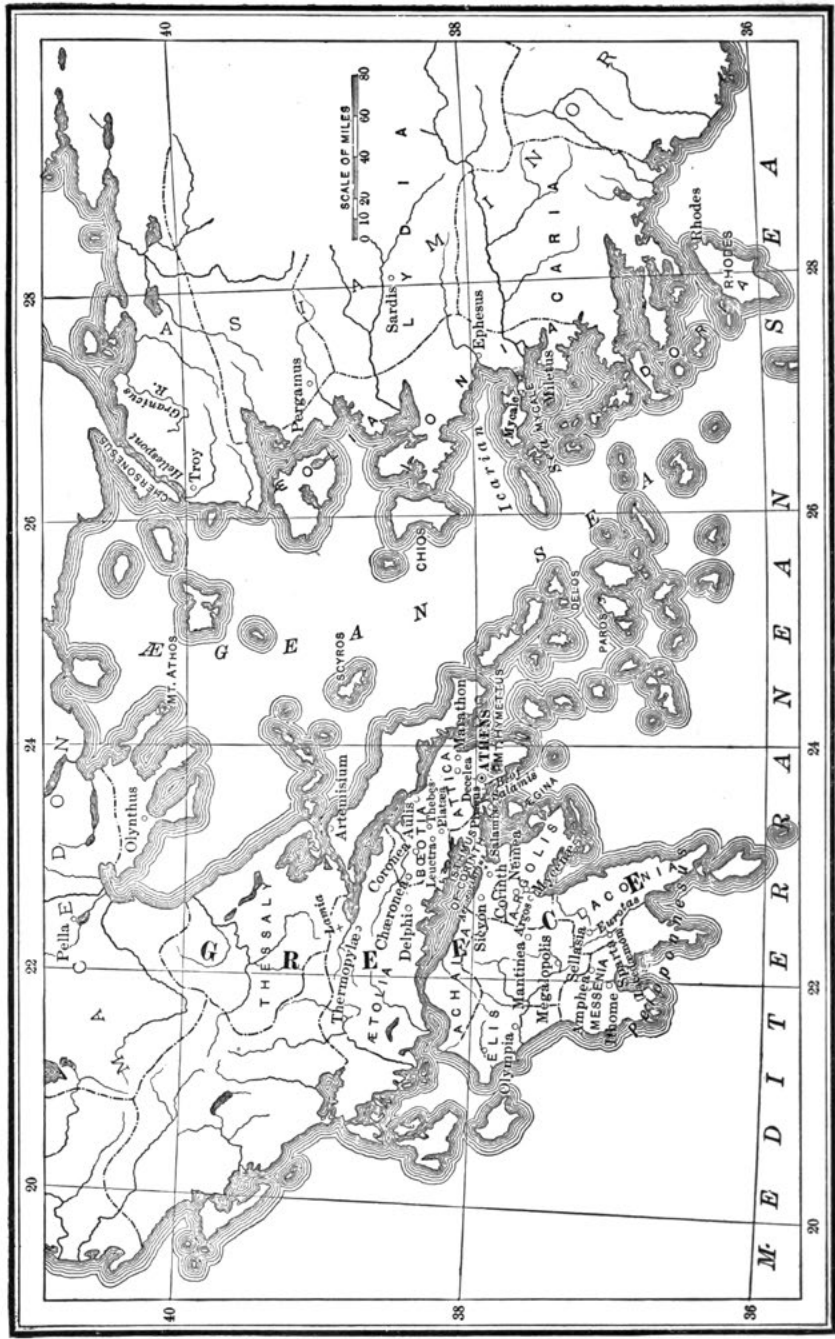
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MAP OF ANCIENT GREECE.











## Early Inhabitants of Greece

**A**LTHOUGH Greece (or Hellas) is only half as large as the state of New York, it holds a very important place in the history of the world. It is situated in the southern part of Europe, cut off from the rest of the continent by a chain of high mountains which form a great wall on the north. It is surrounded on nearly all sides by the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea, which stretch so far inland that it is said no part of the country is forty miles from the sea, or ten miles from the hills. Thus shut in by sea and mountains, it forms a little territory by itself, and it was the home of a noted people.

The history of Greece goes back to the time when people did not know how to write, and kept no record of what was happening around them. For a long while the stories told by parents to their children were the only information which could be had about the country and its former inhabitants; and these stories, slightly changed by every new teller, grew more and more extraordinary as time passed. At last they were so changed that no one could tell where the truth ended and fancy began.

The beginning of Greek history is therefore like a fairy tale; and while much of it cannot, of course, be true, it is the only information we have about the early Greeks. It is these strange fireside stories, which used to amuse Greek children so many years ago, that you are first going to hear.

About two thousand years before the birth of Christ, in the days when Isaac wanted to go down into Egypt, Greece was inhabited by a savage race of men called the Pelasgians. They lived in forests, or in caves hollowed out of the mountain side, and hunted wild beasts with great clubs and stone-tipped arrows and spears. They

were so rude and wild that they ate nothing but raw meat, berries, and the roots which they dug up with sharp stones or even with their hands.

For clothing, the Pelasgians used the skins of the beasts they had killed; and to protect themselves against other savages, they gathered together in families or tribes, each having a chief who led in war and in the chase.

There were other far more civilized nations in those days. Among these were the Egyptians, who lived in Africa. They had long known the use of fire, had good tools, and were much further advanced than the Pelasgians. They had learned not only to build houses, but to erect the most wonderful monuments in the world—the Pyramids, of which you have no doubt heard.

In Egypt there were at that time a number of learned men. They were acquainted with many of the arts and sciences, and recorded all they knew in a peculiar writing of their own invention. Their neighbors, the Phœnicians, whose land also bordered on the Mediterranean Sea, were quite civilized too; and as both of these nations had ships, they soon began to sail all around that great inland sea.

As they had no compass, the Egyptian and Phœnician sailors did not venture out of sight of land. They first sailed along the shore, and then to the islands which they could see far out on the blue waters.

When they had come to one island, they could see another still farther on; for, as you will see on any map, the Mediterranean Sea, between Greece and Asia, is dotted with islands, which look like stepping stones going from one coast to the other.

Advancing thus carefully, the Egyptians and Phœnicians finally came to Greece, where they made settlements, and began to teach the Pelasgians many useful and important things.

# The Deluge of Ogyges

**T**HE first Egyptian who thus settled in Greece was a prince called Inachus. Landing in that country, which has a most delightful climate, he taught the Pelasgians how to make fire and how to cook their meat. He also showed them how to build comfortable homes by piling up stones one on top of another, much in the same way as the farmer makes the stone walls around his fields.

The Pelasgians were intelligent, although so uncivilized; and they soon learned to build these walls higher, in order to keep the wild beasts away from their homes. Then, when they had learned the use of bronze and iron tools, they cut the stones into huge blocks of regular shape.

These stone blocks were piled one upon another so cleverly that some of the walls are still standing, although no mortar was used to hold the stones together. Such was the strength of the Pelasgians, that they raised huge blocks to great heights, and made walls which their descendants declared must have been built by giants.

As the Greeks called their giants Cyclops, which means "round-eyed," they soon called these walls Cyclopean; and, in pointing them out to their children, they told strange tales of the great giants who had built them, and always added that these huge builders had but one eye, which was in the middle of the forehead.

Some time after Inachus the Egyptian had thus taught the Pelasgians the art of building, and had founded a city called Argos, there came a terrible earthquake. The ground under the people's feet heaved and cracked, the mountains shook, the waters flooded the dry land, and the people fled in terror to the hills.

In spite of the speed with which they ran, the waters soon overtook them. Many of the Pelasgians were thus drowned, while their terrified companions ran faster and faster up the mountain, nor stopped to rest until they were quite safe.

Looking down upon the plains where they had once lived, they

saw them all covered with water. They were now forced to build new homes; but when the waters little by little sank into the ground, or flowed back into the sea, they were very glad to find that some of their thickest walls had resisted the earthquake and flood, and were still standing firm.

The memory of the earthquake and flood was very clear, however. The poor Pelasgians could not forget their terror and the sudden death of so many friends, and they often talked about that horrible time. As this flood occurred in the days when Ogyges was king, it has generally been linked to his name, and called the Deluge (or flood) of Ogyges.

## The Founding of Many Important Cities

SOME time after Inachus had built Argos, another Egyptian prince came to settle in Greece. His name was Cecrops, and, as he came to Greece after the Deluge of Ogyges, he found very few inhabitants left. He landed, and decided to build a city on a promontory northeast of Argos. Then he invited all the Pelasgians who had not been drowned in the flood to join him.

The Pelasgians, glad to find such a wise leader, gathered around him, and they soon learned to plow the fields and to sow wheat. Under Cecrops' orders they also planted olive trees and vines, and learned how to press the oil from the olives and the wine from the grapes. Cecrops taught them how to harness their oxen; and before long the women began to spin the wool of their sheep, and to weave it into rough woolen garments, which were used for clothing, instead of the skins of wild beasts.

After building several small towns in Attica, Cecrops founded a larger one, which was at first called Cecropia in honor of himself. This name, however, was soon changed to Athens to please Athene

(or Minerva), a goddess whom the people worshiped, and who was said to watch over the welfare of this her favorite city.

When Cecrops died, he was followed by other princes, who continued teaching the people many useful things, such as the training and harnessing of horses, the building of carts, and the proper way of harvesting grain. One prince even showed them how to make beehives, and how to use the honey as an article of food.

As the mountain sides in Greece are covered with a carpet of wild, sweet-smelling herbs and flowers, the Greek honey is very good; and people

say that the best honey in the world is made by the bees on Mount Hymettus, near Athens, where they gather their golden store all summer long.

Shortly after the building of Athens, a Phœnician colony, led by Cadmus, settled a neighboring part of the country, called Bœotia, where they founded the city which was later known as Thebes. Cadmus also taught the people many useful things, among others the art of trade (or commerce) and that of navigation (the building and using of ships); but, best of all, he brought the alphabet to Greece, and showed the people how to express their thoughts in writing.

Almost at the same time that Cadmus founded Thebes, an Egyptian called Danaus came to Greece, and settled a colony on the same spot where that of Inachus had once been. The new Argos



ATHENE.

rose on the same place as the old; and the country around it, called Argolis, was separated from Bœotia and Attica only by a long narrow strip of land, which was known as the Isthmus of Corinth.

Danaus not only showed the Pelasgians all the useful arts which Cadmus and Cecrops had taught, but also helped them to build ships like that in which he had come to Greece. He also founded religious festivals or games in honor of the harvest goddess, Demeter. The women were invited to these games, and they only were allowed to bear torches in the public processions, where they sang hymns in honor of the goddess.

The descendants of Danaus long ruled over the land; and one member of his family, Perseus, built the town of Mycenæ on a spot where many of the Pelasgian stone walls can still be seen.

The Pelasgians who joined this young hero helped him to build great walls all around his town. These were provided with massive gateways and tall towers, from which the soldiers could overlook the whole country, and see the approach of an enemy from afar.



THE LION GATE, MYCENÆ.



This same people built tombs for some of the ancient kings, and many treasure and store houses. These buildings, buried under earth and rubbish, were uncovered a few years ago. In the tombs were found swords, spears, and remains of ancient armor, gold ornaments, ancient pieces of pottery, human bones, and, strangest of all, thin masks of pure gold, which covered the faces of some of the dead.

Thus you see, the Pelasgians little by little joined the new colonies which came to take possession of the land, and founded little states or countries of their own, each governed by its own king, and obeying its own laws.

## Story of Deucalion

**T**HE Greeks used to tell their children that Deucalion, the leader of the Thessalians, was a descendant of the gods, for each part of the country claimed that its first great man was the son of a god. It was under the reign of Deucalion that another flood took place. This was even more terrible than that of Ogyges; and all the people of the neighborhood fled in haste to the high mountains north of Thessaly, where they were kindly received by Deucalion.

When all danger was over, and the waters began to recede, they followed their leader down into the plains again. This soon gave rise to a wonderful story, which you will often hear. It was said that Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha were the only people left alive after the flood. When the waters had all gone, they went down the mountain, and found that the temple at Delphi, where they worshiped their gods, was still standing unharmed. They entered, and, kneeling before the altar, prayed for help.

A mysterious voice then bade them go down the mountain, throwing their mother's bones behind them. They were very much troubled when they heard this, until Deucalion said that a voice from heaven could not have meant them to do any harm. In think-

ing over the real meaning of the words he had heard, he told his wife, that, as the Earth is the mother of all creatures, her bones must mean the stones.

Deucalion and Pyrrha, therefore, went slowly down the mountain, throwing the stones behind them. The Greeks used to tell that a sturdy race of men sprang up from the stones cast by Deucalion, while beautiful women came from those cast by Pyrrha.

The country was soon peopled by the children of these men, who always proudly declared that the story was true, and that they sprang from the race which owed its birth to this great miracle. Deucalion reigned over this people as long as he lived; and when he died, his two sons, Amphictyon and Hellen, became kings in his stead. The former staid in Thessaly; and, hearing that some barbarians called Thracians were about to come over the mountains and drive his people away, he called the chiefs of all the different states to a council, to ask their advice about the best means of defense. All the chiefs obeyed the summons, and met at a place in Thessaly where the mountains approach the sea so closely as to leave but a narrow pass between. In the pass are hot springs, and so it was called Thermopylæ, or the Hot Gateway.

The chiefs thus gathered together called this assembly the Amphictyonic Council, in honor of Amphictyon. After making plans to drive back the Thracians, they decided to meet once a year, either at Thermopylæ or at the temple at Delphi, to talk over all important matters.

## Story of Daedalus and Icarus

**H**ELLEN, Deucalion's second son, finding Thessaly too small to give homes to all the people, went southward with a band of hardy followers, and settled in another part of the country which we call Greece, but which was then, in honor of him, called Hellas, while his people were called Hellenes, or subjects of Hellen.

When Hellen died, he left his kingdom to his three sons, Dorus, Æolus, and Xuthus. Instead of dividing their father's lands fairly, the eldest two sons quarreled with the youngest, and finally drove him away. Homeless and poor, Xuthus now went to Athens, where he was warmly welcomed by the king, who not only treated him very kindly, but also gave him his daughter in marriage, and promised that he should inherit the throne.

This promise was duly kept, and Xuthus the exile ruled over Athens. When he died, he left the crown to his sons, Ion and Achæus.

As the Athenians had gradually increased in number until their territory was too small to afford a living to all the inhabitants, Ion and Achæus, even in their father's lifetime, led some of their followers along the Isthmus of Corinth, and down into the peninsula, where they founded two flourishing states, called, after them, Achaia and Ionia. Thus, while northern Greece was pretty equally divided between the Dorians and Æolians, descendants and subjects of Dorus and Æolus, the peninsula was almost entirely in the hands of Ionians and Achæans, who built towns, cultivated the soil, and became bold navigators. They ventured farther and farther out at sea, until they were familiar with all the neighboring bays and islands.

Sailing thus from place to place, the Hellenes came at last to Crete, a large island south of Greece. This island was then governed by a very wise king called Minos. The laws of this monarch were so just that all the Greeks admired them very much. When he died, they even declared that the gods had called him away to judge the dead in Hades, and to decide what punishments and rewards the spirits deserved.

Although Minos was very wise, he had a subject named Dædalus who was even wiser than he. This man not only invented the saw and the potter's wheel, but also taught the people how to rig sails for their vessels.

As nothing but oars and paddles had hitherto been used to propel ships, this last invention seemed very wonderful; and to



DÆDALUS AND ICARUS.

compliment Dædalus, the people declared that he had given their vessels wings, and had thus enabled them to fly over the seas.

Many years after, when sails were so common that they ceased to excite any wonder, the people, forgetting that these were the wings which Dædalus had made, invented a wonderful story, which runs as follows.

Minos, King of Crete, once sent for Dædalus, and bade him build a maze, or labyrinth, with so many rooms and winding halls, that no one, once in it, could ever find his way out again.

Dædalus set to work and built a maze so intricate that neither he nor his son Icarus, who was with him, could get out. Not willing to remain there a prisoner, Dædalus soon contrived a means of escape.

He and Icarus first gathered together a large quantity of feathers, out of which Dædalus cleverly made two pairs of wings. When these were fastened to their shoulders by means of wax, father and son rose up like birds and flew away. In spite of his father's cautions, Icarus rose higher and higher, until the heat of the sun melted the wax, so that his wings dropped off, and he fell into the sea and was drowned. His father, more prudent than he, flew low, and reached Greece in safety. There he went on inventing useful things, often gazing out sadly over the waters in which Icarus had perished, and which, in honor of the drowned youth, were long known as the Icarian Sea.

## The Adventures of Jason

**T**HE Hellenes had not long been masters of all Greece, when a Phrygian called Pelops became master of the peninsula, which from him received the name of Peloponnesus. He first taught the people to coin money; and his descendants, the Pelopidæ, took possession of all the land around them, with the exception of Argolis, where the Danaides continued to reign.

Some of the Ionians and Achæans, driven away from their homes by the Pelopidæ, went on board their many vessels, and sailed away.

They formed Hellenic colonies in the neighboring islands along the coast of Asia Minor, and even in the southern part of Italy.

As some parts of Greece were very thinly settled, and as the people clustered around the towns where their rulers dwelt, there were wide, desolate tracts of land between them. Here were many wild beasts and robbers, who lay in wait for travelers on their way from one settlement to another. The robbers, who hid in the forests or mountains, were generally feared and disliked, until at last some brave young warriors made up their minds to fight against them and to kill them all. These young men were so brave that they well deserved the name of heroes, which has always been given them; and they met with many adventures about which the people loved to hear. Long after they had gone, the inhabitants, remembering their relief when the robbers were killed, taught their children to honor these brave young men almost as much as the gods, and they called the time when they lived the Heroic Age.

Not satisfied with freeing their own country from wild men and beasts, the heroes wandered far away from home in search of further adventures. These have also been told over and over again to children of all countries and ages, until every one is expected to know something about them. Fifty of these heroes, for instance, went on board of a small vessel called the "Argo," sailed across the well-known waters, and ventured boldly into unknown seas. They were in search of a Golden Fleece, which they were told they would find in Colchis, where it was said to be guarded by a great dragon.

The leader of these fifty adventurers was Jason, an Æolian prince, who brought them safely to Colchis, whence, as the old stories relate, they brought back the Golden Fleece. They also brought home the king's daughter, who married Jason, and ruled his kingdom with him. Of course, as there was no such thing as a Golden Fleece, the Greeks merely used this expression to tell about the wealth which they got in the East, and carried home with them; for the voyage of the "Argo" was in reality the first distant commercial journey undertaken by the Greeks.