Preface

My interest in the historical aspects of early Greek poetry goes back to a graduate seminar at the University of Toronto conducted by Prof. L. E. Woodbury in 1960–61. Prof. D. J. Conacher, also of Toronto, suggested that the approach I had used in *The Political Background of Aeschylean Tragedy* (1966) might be applicable to other periods, or genres, of Greek literature. The present study, however, takes a somewhat different form from the earlier one. It is not a detailed analysis of one poet's work, but a survey of many poets who lived and wrote at different times, in diffuse poetic idioms, at widely scattered places, and for varied audiences. It is my firm conviction that these early Greek poets cannot be appreciated fully, or even, in some cases, understood at all, apart from the socio-historic milieus in which they worked; conversely, the poetry often has new and interesting light to shed on the historical currents of the archaic age in Greece. This, then, is not primarily a book about the poetry, or even the poets as such, but about them as important historical figures (thus, such minor writers as Semonides and Hipponax receive only passing mention); about the times in which they lived and wrote; about the events in which they participated; and about what they had to say on the subject of these historically interesting and important happenings.

At a later stage in planning the book, I took up my wife's challenge to write without footnotes, which too often these days are "endnotes" acting as a brake upon speedy progress through the subject matter of the work or,

worse, as an excuse to engage in scholarly controversy. Still, readers have a right to know on whose ancient authority a statement is based, and students need to be able to refer to other modern authorities, especially when their views are different from mine and need to be taken into account in arriving at a balanced position. I have therefore provided fairly fully citations of ancient sources in the text and a final bibliographical section, "Further Reading." The indices at the end are intended to allow readers to find out what, if anything, I have to say about specific passages and topics.

At the penultimate stage of editing the manuscript it was put to me that those who were coming to this subject for the first time might find a separate chronological narrative helpful. The paragraphs that follow are intended to supply this need; they can also serve as a conspectus of the book's contents.

Poetry for the Greeks (as for all Western Europeans) began with "Homer." His two great poems, or the poems that have passed under his name, purport to relate events that occurred about 1200 B.C. Even if a direct poetic line of descent from then until Homer's own day, in about 700 B.C., cannot be proven, the traditions of Mycenaean Greece may well have been kept alive over the centuries to provide inspiration to a bard composing some 500 years later. His Ionian audience, whether in court or marketplace, clearly felt that they were descended from the Mycenaeans by virtue of an exodus of their ancestors from the mainland across the Aegean to the shores of modern Turkey, a "migration" that is dated by historians on various grounds to about 1000 B.C. or slightly before.

On the Greek mainland, the long tradition of poetry began with Hesiod, whose father (apparently as a private individual) had emigrated from Aeolis, just north of Ionia on the Turkish coast. Hesiod's exact relation to Homer is a subject of heated controversy amongst scholars today, but it seems clear that they were not far separated in time and that his two major poems must have been completed and in circulation before 650 B.C. In his work the hexameter verse form takes a new direction: Hesiod's purpose is not just to entertain, but to instruct and edify his audience. This didactic mission that the poet felt called upon to uphold had a long life in ancient Greece.

In addition to Homer and his successors, the composers of so-called "Cyclic" epic verse, Ionia bred a different kind of poet, one whose interests were in exposing his innermost feelings and capturing his everyday experiences—war, love, sexual pleasure, adventure—with an immediacy and sense of personal involvement unknown to epic. Archilochus was the first brilliant practitioner of this personal lyric; he lived and wrote not very far from 650 B.C. and was active on the Ionian islands of Paros and Thasos. Shortly afterward, in a neighbouring area where a different Greek dialect, Aeolic,

was in use, Archilochus' first-person intimacy was being echoed, although probably not consciously imitated, by two aristocrats whose home was on the island of Lesbos, Alcaeus and Sappho, who flourished about 600 B.C.

Elegy is a verse form that many think derives from the epic hexameter but it also reflects some of the intimate concerns of the lyricist. The elegiac form was perfected on the Ionian coast by the writers Callinus and Mimnermus, whose careers together spanned the last half of the seventh century. The form of Ionian elegy was transplanted to the southern part of the Greek mainland shortly before 650 B.C., and took root in the unlikely soil of Sparta. There Tyrtaeus composed verses suited to his audience's militaristic temperament. As if to show that man's other side had to be given nourishment as well, before 600 B.C. the poet Alcman was composing for Spartan religious gatherings choral compositions of great liveliness and charm. Poetry had a relatively late beginning in Athens, for we hear of no local poets before Solon, who achieved the highest political office in 594 B.C. Although he composed in a variety of metres, his main output was elegiac and, indeed, his debt to the Ionian elegy—and ultimately to Homer—was enormous. But Solon turned his poetic talents to new, specifically political, ends, and his work gives the impression that his ideas were in advance of the time: he saw the social ills and civil unrest that beset his country and tried his best to warn the citizens to put their houses in order. Theognis of neighbouring Megara, on the other hand, whose dates are disputed but who may have lived in the generation after Solon, seems to have his head buried in the past. The Megarian aristocrats' grip on control of public affairs is slipping, but Theognis wants them to hold on at all costs and refuses to allow any challenge from other, "lower" (his term) elements of society.

By a process of transference that is not altogether clear, the Greeks in the West took over a good deal from their epic forerunners in Ionia: much of Homer's language, his core of heroic myth (but with significant additions), the sense of occasion that must have inspired public recitations in epic verse. But the poets of South Italy and Sicily innovated: they cast their stories in vast, leisurely narratives liberally dotted with dialogue, and they composed for performance, as it appears (although some scholars dispute the assertion) by choruses. Stesichorus of Himera in Sicily, whose working life spanned the first half of the sixth century, was the best-known practitioner, but there were other, more shadowy figures like Xenocritus of Locri. The south Italian writer Ibycus, perhaps a student of Stesichorus, may have travelled east to the court of Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, about 530 B.C. A separate branch of the western poetic tradition is represented by Xenophanes, who left Colophon, his native city in Ionia, at some time in the sixth century and took up residence in various Sicilian cities, settling finally at Velia in southern Italy. He wrote iambs, hexameters, and elegies in which he

criticized the Homeric portrayal of the gods and, more important, put forward his own more metaphysical conception. Thus was the didactic stream in early Greek poetry turned to a more technically philosophical channel.

Polycrates' Samian court was graced by two other poets of international reputation, Simonides, from the island of Ceos off the coast of Attica, and the Ionian Anacreon, whose name soon became synonymous with the pleasures of the carefree life. Both these writers removed to the Athenian tyrants' court about 522 B.C., and both later took commissions in Thessaly. Simonides returned to write odes commemorating the victories of the fledgling Athenian democracy against the Persian invaders at the beginning of the fifth century, and he has the additional distinction of initiating the victory ode, a choral poem performed on a solemn public occasion to honour the victors of the great international athletic competitions at Delphi, Olympia, and elsewhere. His odes are for the most part lost, but the works of the greatest exponent of this form, Pindar, survive almost entire, although his comparable achievements in the other lyric modes can only be guessed at. Simonides' nephew Bacchylides, who was also Pindar's rival, was an only slightly less sought after composer of victory eulogies; much of his work has come to light through the assiduous researches of papyrologists. These two poets, who took commissions in most of the major and many of the minor cities of Greece throughout the first half of the fifth century, bring to a close the first, lyric, period of Greek poetry.

I wish to acknowledge the encouragement and assistance rendered me by: Archibald Allen, Walter Donlan (both former colleagues at Pennsylvania State University); John Smart of Leeds University; Brian Lavelle and Allison Maingon, former graduate students of mine, and Malcolm Willcock, then of Lancaster, now of the University of London. These friends read various parts of my book, offered helpful criticisms and suggested improvements (as did several anonymous readers enlisted by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities). To them all I express warm gratitude and offer the customary absolution: mistakes and ambiguities that remain are to be laid at my door, not theirs. I am also grateful to E. L. Bowie of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, whose class on problems in the early Greek lyric poets I attended in 1972.