

Historical Allusions

Aristotle. The Greek philosopher (384-322 B.C.), who at 18 came from Stagira, his birthplace, to Athens to study at Plato's Academy, where he became known as the nous (mind) of the school. After Plato's death in 348, he was invited by Philip of Macedon to tutor his son, Alexander. Aristotle emphasized logic and rationality and a strict scientific approach to philosophical questions. Plato had maintained that immutable reality was embodied in pure Forms or Ideas, entities existing outside the mind and accessible to the mind alone, particular and material objects being only an imitation of these eternal types. Aristotle departed from this metaphysical outlook, postulating a duality of Spirit and Matter, in which form is inherent in material being and man's knowledge stems from the experience of the senses, out of which the universal is then perceived. Thus he emphasized deduction and the investigation of concrete objects and situations. His works include the *De Anima*, *Physica*, *Metaphysica*, *Politica*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*. Today Aristotelian has the critical connotation of an objective approach, focusing on the work directly under consideration rather than on its social or moral contexts.

Attic salt. Particularly acute, graceful, biting wit, as embodied in the satirical comedies of Aristophanes (445 B.C.-380 B.C.).

Bard of Avon. Shakespeare, born at Stratford-on-Avon. Also, Sweet Swan of Avon – from Ben Jonson's elegy, "To the Memory of my Beloved, the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare."

Crossing the Rubicon. In 49 B.C. Julius Caesar, under ban of Rome, returned from his province of Cisalpine Gaul and precipitated a civil war. The fateful, irrevocable decision to march against Pompey was made at the Rubicon, a small river separating the province from Italy. Caesar crossed uttering the words, "Jacta alea est" – "The die is cast." Today it means a fateful decision, or a decision from which there is no turning back.

Deus ex machina. Literally, "the god from the machine", this mechanical device in Greek drama lowered onto the stage the god who intervened to provide a solution to the dramatic conflict. Now the term has come to mean any rescuing agency introduced by the author to bring about a desired conclusion, usually without regard to the logic of character or situation.

Don Juan. Don Juan Tenorio, son of a prominent 14th century family in Seville, had a reputation for seducing women. He killed the commander of Ulloa after seducing his daughter, and was eventually lured into a Franciscan monastery, where the monks killed him. His life provided the model for the Don Juan legend, utilized by Mozart in his opera *Don Giovanni*, by Byron in his poem *Don Juan*, and by George Bernard Shaw in his "Don Juan in Hell," part of *Man and Superman*. Today used, like Cananova and Lothario, for a man who pursues amorous adventures with many women.

Draco. The seventh-century B.C. lawgiver of Athens noted for the severity of the laws he laid down. "Draconian" thus refers to any unusually harsh law or code.

Godiva, Lady. The patroness of Coventry, England, who sought to have removed certain exactions that Leofric, Earl of Mercia, imposed on his tenants in 1040. According to legend, Leofric agreed to do so if Lady Godiva rode naked through the town at noon. She did so, and he kept his word. All the townspeople stayed indoors but a tailor peeped at her through a window and, in consequence, was blinded. See also: Peeping Tom.

Hellenic. Adjective referring to the culture of Hellas, or Greece, from about the date of the First Olympiad, 776 B.C., to the death of Alexander the Great, 323 B.C. See also: Hellas.

Hippocrates. “The father of medicine,” a Greek doctor (ca. 460-377 B.C.) born in the island of Cos, author of 87 treatises on aspects of medicine. Physicians today take the Hippocratic oath.

Hippocratic oath. An oath attributed to Hippocrates, “the father of medicine,” and enjoined upon his followers, setting up a canon of behavior, integrity and loyalty for doctors. One version begins with the words, “I swear by Apollo, the physician, by Aesculapius, by Hygeia, by Panacea, and by all the gods and goddesses...” The so-called Hippocratic oath taken by the medical profession today is much shorter and somewhat different although the intent is in many respects the same.

Holy City. A city which becomes holy through its association with a given religion, such as Jerusalem to Christians and Jews, Benares to Hindus, Mecca and Medina to the Muslims

Homer. Commonly accepted as the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, although for a long time various scholars argued that these were the works of different writers. No details of his life are known for certain. He is supposed to have been blind, and is often referred to as “The Blind Bard.” It is not known where he was born, although tradition has it that he came from a city in Asia Minor, such as Smyrna, or from an Aegean island, such as Chios. His date has been fixed as anywhere from the ninth century B.C. down to the seventh. The epics of Homer, held in reverence in the classical age as in our own, formed the basis of the literary education of the ancient Greeks and contain a treasure house of Greek mythology. Today, “Homeric” carries the suggestion heroic, larger-than-life.

Mecca. The birthplace of Mohammed; Holy City of the Mohammedans and the goal of the pilgrimages that are a required rite in the Moslem religion. By extension, any goal for pilgrims

Music of the spheres. Pythagoras, in his search for universal harmonies, established that all solids in motion emit musical tones, and applying this law to the planets, stated that their collective tone constituted the “music of the spheres.” The phrase suggests a harmony inherent in the heavens, but imperceptible to man.

Noble Savage. The idea, derived from Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) and incorporated into the thought of the Romantics, that man in his primitive original condition is good and noble, and that he is corrupted by his flawed and over-sophisticated social institutions.

Olympic Games. One of the four sacred festivals (the other three were the Pythian Games at Delphi, the Isthmian games at Corinth and the Nemean games at Nemea) of the ancient Greeks, held every fourth year in July on the plain of Olympia in Elis in honor of Zeus, and consisting of all types of sporting and athletic contests, beginning and ending with sacrifices to the gods. In modern times the tradition was reestablished in 1896, with Games held every four years since then, excepting the years of the World Wars.

Pantheon. A temple devoted to all the gods (from Greek, pan, “all,” theon, “of the gods”); specifically, the Roman domed edifice built by Hadrian from 120 to 124 A.D. and incorporating the porch of a structure built by Agrippa in 27 B.C. It became a church in 609 A.D., and is still standing. The word pantheon often means a selected group of eminent individuals, such as those honored in a hall of fame.

Peeping Tom. The one citizen of Coventry who (legend says) looked upon the naked Godiva during her ride through the town. Hence, a voyeur.

Philippic. Demosthenes often orated against Philip of Macedon in order to incite the Athenians against him. These speeches were full of acrimony, accusation and invective; hence the modern meaning of the word, a speech of bitter denunciation.

Sacred cow. This expression is one of the very few to come into English from Hinduism. The origins of the cult of the cow are not known for certain; it was not introduced to India by the Aryan invaders, who were beef-eaters, and the edicts of Ashoka (third century B.C.) show that the slaughter of cows was not yet prohibited. Today however, the Hindu taboo against killing cows or eating beef is even more powerful than the Jewish and Moslem prohibition against eating pork. In American usage a sacred cow is anything – a creed, institution or person – so revered as to be beyond public criticism.

Seven wonders of the ancient world. The following are generally accepted as the seven most remarkable structures of the ancient world, from the grouping originally made by Antipater of Sidon in the second century B.C.

1. The Pyramid of Cheops (Khufu, the fourth Dynasty, about 3,000 B.C.). Situated near Memphis, Egypt, this is the largest of the Pyramids, supposedly designed as the tomb of Cheops, containing a complicated inner structure. It is still in situ, though not of course in its original splendor.
2. The Pharos (Lighthouse) at Alexandria. Built on an island in the harbor of Alexandria, Egypt, during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-277 B.C.), about 590 feet high, consisting of at least four towers; designed by Sostratus, who devised an ingenious system of lighting with fires and a huge mirror. It was partly destroyed by the Arabs in the ninth century, and the remainder was used as a mosque for a time; in 1375 an earthquake destroyed it entirely.
3. Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Not really 'hanging' but built on terraces or balconies, with arches as supports, to a height of about 350 feet and irrigated by hydraulic pumps. Built by Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 B.C.).
4. Temple of Artemis at Ephesus. Built on the site of earlier shrines, the great temple at Ephesus in Asia Minor was erected in the sixth century B.C. with the help of donations from Croesus and others. It was so magnificent that Herodotus compared it to the Pyramids. Sacked and burned in the third century A.D., the temple's marble was later used for building. Parts of the columns and sculpture are now in the British Museum.
5. Statue of the Olympian Zeus. Known mainly from descriptions by ancient writers, especially Pausanias, from coins, and from circumstantial evidence of excavators. Situated at Olympia, it was the work of Phidias and was made of gold and ivory. Zeus sat on a throne, carried a Nike, or Victory, in his right hand, a sceptre in his left. Elaborately sculptured scenes from mythology adorned the throne. The fate of the statue is unknown.
6. Mausoleum at Halicarnassus. Built in 353-350 B.C. in Halicarnassus, Asia Minor, as a tomb for King Mausolus by order of his widow, Artemisia. It was a tremendous structure, 140 feet high, with different levels. It has, of course, given the English language the word Mausoleum. In the 15th and 16th centuries opposing sides in a war between Turks and Christians took turns in occupying and destroying parts of the Mausoleum; parts of it can, however, be seen in the British Museum.
7. Colossus of Rhodes. A gigantic bronze statue, about 105 feet high, of Helios, the sun god, set up (292-280 B.C.) at the entrance to the harbor of Rhodes, an island in the Aegean Sea. The

belief that the statue stood astride the harbor waters and that ships passed under it is a bit of medieval fancy not authenticated by ancient writers. The statue was erected as an offering of thanksgiving to Helios, protector of Rhodes, to commemorate the successful resistance of the Rhodians to the siege by the forces of Antigonos and Demetrius, successors of Alexander, in 307 B.C. It was toppled by an earthquake in 224 B.C., and its fragments sold as junk in 672 A.D. Our word "colossal" (gigantic, vast) derives from the Greek work colossus, meaning gigantic statue.

Spartacus. A Thracian slave who escaped in 73 B.C. from the school for gladiators in Capua, Italy, he stirred up an insurrection of slaves and other desperate men, defeated Roman armies in several battles until his own army was finally crushed by Crasus in 71 B.C. and he himself was killed. Spartacus is the subject of a novel (1951) of the same name by the American writer Howard Fast, and of a ballet (1954), also so named, by the Soviet composer Aram Khachaturian.

Talmud. The traditional body of Jewish law, consisting of the Mishnah, which contains the obligatory precepts of the elders and is a supplement to the Pentateuch and the Gemara, which comments on the contents of the Mishnah. Its codification was completed by the end of the fifth century A.D.

Torah. The scriptural writings of the Jews containing the word and revelation of God; sometimes, the Pentateuch alone, sometimes the entire Old Testament and sometimes the Old Testament and the Talmud.

White Elephant. The sacred animal of Thailand, formerly Siam, is the white elephant. When the king wished to cause someone's ruin, he gave him a white elephant, which was very expensive and brought no profit. Hence a "white elephant" is an object, hobby or luxury ruinously expensive to maintain.