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Homer and Early Greece

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By HANS VAN WEES

THE *ILIAD* AND *ODYSSEY* tell of a time when the earth was populated by a superhuman race of great strength, distant lands were inhabited by cannibals and nymphs, and gods moved among mortals. Yet these poems have since antiquity been mined for historical information about the past world in which the legends are set.

Just when the hunt for historical kernels was finally being abandoned as futile, the excavations conducted by Heinrich Schliemann from 1870 onwards brought to light the city which had inspired the legend of Troy, and, in mainland Greece, the Mycenaean civilization (1600-1200 BC) which had inspired the idea of a heroic age. These important discoveries turned back the clock, as generations of scholars once more set off in search of historical fact buried in the legends. Unfortunately, but with the benefit of hindsight not surprisingly, this search turned out to be something of a wild goose chase. Despite seeming initial successes, all the learning and ingenuity brought to bear has ultimately identified only a few possible Mycenaean phrases and equally few Mycenaean artefacts in the epics, while even those who defend the historicity of the Trojan War are forced to dismiss what legend tells us about its cause, course, duration, and participants. Whatever the precise extent of the genuine Mycenaean element preserved in Homer—a question which continues to be debated—it is clearly too small to allow the use of the epics as independent sources for the history or society of the Mycenaean age.[1]

If we are to treat the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as historical evidence, it must be primarily as sources for the world in which their author(s) and audiences lived. Fond as literary critics are of stressing the "timeless value" of the great works they study, literature is necessarily a product of its time. It is telling, for example, that the *Odyssey* ends with the settlement of the feud between

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1. Development of modern attitudes toward Homeric society's place in history: Morris (1997). For the current consensus that there is virtually no Mycenaean material in the epics, see Morris and Powell, eds. (1997) *A New Companion to Homer* esp. xvii, 533, 625, in contrast to its predecessor, Wace and Stubbings (1962) *A Companion to Homer*. Contrast also the studies on *Homer und Mykene* by Patzek (1992) (also, e.g., Giovannini [1989]; Dickinson [1986]) with Webster's *From Mycenai to Homer* (1958) and Nilsson's *Homer and Mycenae* (1933) (also, e.g., Luce [1975]; Page [1959]). More recent defenders of a sizable Mycenaean element in Homer include Hood (1995) and Hooker (1988). Historicity of the Trojan War: Kirk (1990) 36-50; Davies (1984); Hainsworth (1984); Finley et al.(1964), 1-20.

the hero and his enemies. Ever since the third century BC, critics have felt that it could and should have ended sooner, at the point where the hero is reunited with his wife. Evidently, the *Odyssey* was the product of an age when revenge was of paramount importance, not the love interest which came to fascinate audiences as values changed. Even in something as fundamental as the expression of emotions, the epics are time-bound: to their original audiences it was apparently acceptable for men to weep uncontrollably and gods to laugh loudly, but many a later reader has found such behaviour puzzling, indeed scandalous.

The first definite signs that the world of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* has become alien to Greek audiences arrive as early as the late sixth century BC, and are soon followed by the first strained attempts to give the poems a new relevance by interpreting them as allegories.[2]

That the epics are products of their time does not mean that the world of the heroes is a simple copy of the world of their poets. On the one hand, in the absence of—and even in the face of—much historical information to the contrary, people do tend to imagine the past as much like the present. Poets are no exception, and it would be odd if the heroic world did not in at least some ways mirror contemporary life. On the other hand, the setting in a remote and superior past allows for a large element of idealization and fantasy, too: the heroic world may encompass not only things as they are (or were), but also things as they should be, and things as they might have been. We must disentangle these disparate elements, which is not always easy, but worth the effort: a society's ideals and fantasies are of as much historical interest as its actual norms, customs, and institutions.

The historian's task is further complicated by the lack of solid answers to the basic questions one must ask of any source: when, where, and why was it created? The epics, attributed to a legendary poet, grew out of an oral tradition of uncertain origin and duration and were given their final form at an uncertain time and place, for reasons not stated. We will thus need to reconstruct the history of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* before we can begin to reconstruct Greek history from them. External evidence tells us enough to provide some approximate answers, and we shall see that it may give us a more precise indication of when and why the epics were composed than has yet been recognized.

The Eighth Century and the Legend of Homer

PROBABLY THE MOST widely shared view on the origins of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is that they were written down in the second half of the eighth century BC. The main reason for its popularity is not that it has much support in the sources, but that it offers a convenient compromise between ancient legend about Homer and modern theory about the introduction of the alphabet in Greece.

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2. Alienation: Xenophanes frr.10-12 Diels-Krantz (from 540s BC onwards); allegorization: Theagenes of Rhegion, Diels-Krantz fr. 8 (520s BC). See Lamberton (1997) 35, 43.

Tradition tells us that our epics were written by Homer, a poet dated by most ancient sources no later than the beginning of the ninth century BC. That is impossibly early, above all because the Greeks did not have a system of writing until about a century later: after centuries of illiteracy, they adopted the alphabet around 800 BC. It has recently been suggested that the alphabet was invented for the very purpose of writing down epic poetry, which would therefore have been recorded right at the beginning of the century. More commonly and plausibly, it is assumed that the new script was invented for other uses and that at least a generation or two would have passed before it was employed to write down long epics, giving an earliest likely date of c. 750 BC.[3] At the same time, if anything is to be salvaged from the tradition about Homer, the epics ought to have been composed before the work of the first known historical poets, who date to the middle of the seventh century. For *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* this would mean a lowest conceivable date of 650 BC, but a date before 700 BC would more easily fit the legendary status of their author.

The question is whether there *is* anything worth rescuing in ancient beliefs about Homer. In the Classical period, Homer was generally regarded as a tenth-generation descendant of the mythical singer Orpheus, which meant that he had lived nine generations, or about three centuries, after the Trojan War, which in turn dated his lifetime to the first half of the ninth century BC. When Herodotos dated him to c. 850 BC ("four hundred years before me, and no more," 2.53), he was, as his polemical tone suggests, pressing for a rather low date. Several sources suggested that the poet was born around 907 BC.[4] Theopompos and Euphorion, two scholars who radically brought Homer down to the first half of the seventh century, were in a very small minority.[5]

The trend among Hellenistic scholars was to push Homer further back in time and ever closer to the legendary events which he described. Eratosthenes, who dated the fall of Troy to 1184/3 BC, suggested that Homer lived but a single century afterwards. "Most people" accepted this, but there were those who made the poet's birth coincide with the start of the Ionian migration or with the foundation of Smyrna, 140 and 168 years after the Trojan

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3. The date of c. 800 BC for the introduction of the alphabet may not be incontrovertible, but does have a powerful case to support it. From the eighth century onward an increasingly large number of clay pots are inscribed with names, alphabets, sentences, and verses. Of the very large number of pots from earlier centuries none bears any text, which strongly suggests that, at the time, the Greeks had no system of writing. Some (including Ruijgh [1995] 26-47 and Bernal [1990]), however, use arguments based on the relation between Greek and Phoenician letter forms to suggest much earlier dates; for a survey of these arguments, and alternative explanations, see Wilson (forthcoming). Epic already written down c. 800 BC: Powell (1991; 1997).

4. Ten generations after Orpheus (or Mousaios): Pherekydes *FGrHist* 3 F 167; Hellanikos *FGrHist* 4 F 5; Damastes *FGrHist* 5 F 11; Gorgias, fr. 25 Diels-Krantz. Ephoros (*FGrHist* 70 F 102) said Homer "was famous" in 876, which may mean a date of birth in 906; the *Marmor Parium* (*FGrHist* 239 A 29) gives 907/6; Suda s.v. *Homeros:* 908 (132 years before the first Olympiad); *Vita Homeri Scorialensis:* c. 894/3 (290 years after the Trojan War). On the lack of foundation for ancient dates for the Trojan War: Burkert (1995).

5. Theopompos *FGrHist* 115 F 205; Euphorion *FHG* iii, 72 F 1. Presumably they were among "the chronographers" who, according to Strabo (1.2.9), dated Homer around the time of the Kimmerian invasion of Asia Minor, i.e., in the mid-seventh century.

War, respectively.[6] In the second century BC, Krates of Mallos boldly
declared that Homer had lived a mere 60 years after the war, making him of
an age to be Odysseus' grandson. Krates made such an impact that several
hundred years later, under the emperor Hadrian, no less an authority than the
Delphic oracle proclaimed that Homer had indeed been Odysseus' grandson,
born of Telemakhos and a daughter of Nestor's.[7]

It was left to Byzantine scholars to take the inevitable final step and turn
Homer into a contemporary of the heroes whose tales he tells. That view is
incompatible with the epics themselves, but has such intrinsic appeal that,
ever since, it has played on the minds of the more romantic readers, including
an early nineteenth-century scholar who convinced himself that our poet had
been "Agamemnon's *aide-de-camp,* or perhaps his secretary."[8]

Clearly, the Greeks had no real information about Homer's lifetime. Nor
did they have any about his work. We shall see that hymns to the gods com-
posed as late as the sixth century could still be attributed to Homer, and that
their real authors might positively encourage such attributions to their leg-
endary predecessor. A great many other works, including a series of shorter
epics, some epigrams, and a few comic poems, were ascribed to Homer, too,
even when their actual authors were known, as in the case of the *Battle of
Frogs and Mice,* composed by one Pigres in the early fifth century.

Homer was, then, a legendary figure imagined to have stood at the begin-
ning of the tradition of epic poetry, to whom those who worked in the genre
conventionally ascribed their compositions. In all probability, he was leg-
endary already by the time our *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were created. That would
explain why, with a single exception, all the ancient dates assigned to the
poet fall well before even the earliest modern estimate of the time of the
poems. If the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* continued to be regarded as Homer's own
work and no other author was ever suggested, while all other "Homeric"
poetry was eventually rejected as inauthentic and reassigned to other authors,
this was no doubt simply because they were longest and best of all, not
because there was any evidence that theirs was the only genuine attribution.

In support of 750-700 BC as the time at which our epics were composed
some further external evidence can be produced, but it is fair to say that this
amounts to very little and that scholars have been uncharacteristically uncriti-
cal of its value, gratefully seizing upon anything, however tenuous, that
might corroborate a date favoured on other grounds.

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6. Eratosthenes *FGrHist* 241 F 9. "Most people": [Plutarch], *Life of Homer* (II). At time of Ionian migra-
tion: Philokhoros *FGrHist* 328 F 211 (and Aristarkhos cited ibid.); at time of foundation of Smyrna:
[Herodotos], *Life of Homer* 38. According to Apollodoros (*FGrHist* 244 FF 61-63), Homer was born 100
years after the Ionian migration, i.e., 944/3 BC.

7. Krates, cited at *FGrHist* 241 F 9, in [Plutarch], *Life of Homer* (II), *Vita Homeri Romana.* Delphic ora-
cle: *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* 314.

8. Byzantine scholars: Tzetzes, *Chil.* 645-46; Isaac Porphyrogenitos, *Introduction to Homer* 10.
Quotation from a letter by Paul-Louis Courier (1805), cited in Albracht (1886) 4.

Linguistic evidence has been thought to provide authoritative dates of c. 750-725 for the *Iliad* and c. 743-713 for the *Odyssey*. In principle, it is possible to date a text by its vocabulary, spelling, and grammar,[9] and Richard Janko's *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns* (1982) demonstrated that the frequency of older forms declines from *Iliad* to *Odyssey,* and again, more dramatically, from the *Odyssey* to the poems of Hesiod. The excellence of the linguistic analysis, however, should not make us forget that its translation into historical dates is essentially guesswork. We do not know how long it might have taken for, say, long forms of the dative plural to decline from 85.4 percent to 85.2 percent in frequency, as they do between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Perhaps differences as marginal as this cannot be translated into any span of time at all.[10] Even if the length of the intervals has been guessed correctly, a conversion into absolute dates requires a fixed point for at least one of the poems. No such fixed points are provided by the epic language, and one must look for them, as Janko did, in the kinds of historical evidence discussed below.[11] The linguistic evidence, in other words, does not offer independent dates.

Many have seen proof that our epics were composed before 700 BC in the fact that epic stories and epic formulas were known in the eighth century. This line of argument wilfully ignores the universally recognized existence of an oral poetic tradition long before the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. That the epics were not created from scratch is clear from their frequent and systematic use of the kind of formulaic phrases, lines, and passages found in oral poetic traditions across the world. Unless one finds very detailed parallels or explicit borrowing, therefore, it is not possible to demonstrate that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* as opposed to an oral tradition of heroic poetry, existed in the eighth century.

Thus, one cannot claim that early poets such as Hesiod and Tyrtaios "adapted" verses from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* and that these poems therefore predate them. Similarities between poems occur when poets draw on a common stock of oral, formulaic material, not only when they borrow from established texts. Scholars who have tried their hand at distinguishing original formula from imitation argue that the "original" is the one which works best in its context, but by that criterion one can only distinguish more and less skilful uses of traditional material—and even then one critic's "clumsy adapta-

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9. The epics were composed in an artificial poetic language, which unfortunately means that we cannot date them through comparison with the more colloquial language of other poetry or inscriptions, contra Visser (1997) 12 n.29; Ruijgh (1995) 17-21.

10. Janko shows that the linguistic differences between the *Iliad* and *Theogony* are four times greater than those between the *Theogony* and *Works and Days,* and five times greater than those between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. He proceeds to guess (1982) 230-31 that the differences between Hesiod's two poems imply a gap of at least ten years and assumes a steady rate of change: this produces a gap of at least forty years between the *Iliad* and *Theogony,* and eight years between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. His other calculations (ibid., Table 47) are based on randomly chosen intervals of 20, 40, 60, or 80 years between the *Iliad* and *Theogony*—or, to be precise, on intervals imposed by the equation of the lowest common denominator (0.15) of the four points on the arbitrarily chosen scale (*Iliad* 0; *Theogony* 3; hence *Odyssey* 0.6; *W&D* 3.75) with units of 1, 2, 3, or 4 years to produce round numbers.

11. The *Theogony* is dated by supposed borrowing from it by Semonides and by an assumed reference to the Lelantine War (the date of which is established by tenuous criteria). The *Odyssey* is dated by vase paintings of the adventure with the Cyclops (see below) and by allusions to colonization (see below).

tion" is another's "daring originality."[12] With other kinds of literary parallels the problem is that they are simply not specific enough. The best and earliest instance is an eighth-century graffito which refers to Nestor's drinking-cup, as featured in the *Iliad* (11.632-37). The epigram has been said to derive from our epic, presumed to have been "a bestseller" at the time, but there is no reason to think that the composer of the *Iliad* was the first and only poet to speak of Nestor's cup. The cup may well have been a traditional attribute of this hero, just as a huge shield was a traditional attribute of the hero Aias.[13]

The appearance of epic episodes and plot elements in art is also inconclusive as evidence. A good example is a set of vases of 675-650 BC depicting Odysseus' adventure with the Cyclops. All are close to the epic account, but none exactly matches it, and they fail to prove that the painters were familiar with our *Odyssey*, since the story was so well known *before* the composition of the poem that its author did not even need to mention the vital detail that the Cyclops had only one eye. The first heroic scenes in art appear in the second half of the eighth century, but until perhaps the late seventh century they do not match the epics in such detail that knowledge of our texts can be safely assumed.[14]

The chief reason why scholars have been prepared to overlook such, surely obvious, objections is, as suggested, that these arguments support the earliest possible date, and only the earliest possible date can rescue the ancient belief that the epics had been created by Homer. It must be conceded, I think, that the external evidence marshalled in defence of an eighth-century date and authorship by Homer himself is far from conclusive. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey could* have been composed at a later date, by an anonymous author—and there is evidence for the history of their transmission which suggests that they *were*.

The "Publication" of Iliad *and* Odyssey: *Kynaithos and the Sixth Century*

IN THE LATE FIFTH century BC, an Athenian could go and listen to a recital of selections from *Iliad* or *Odyssey* by a professional singer of epic, a rhapsode (*rhapsôidos*), "almost every day." These rhapsodes committed to memory the

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12. The notion of direct "borrowing" was rejected already by Rothe (1910) 119-20. It has also been argued that the epics incorporate verses adapted from Hesiod, and thus postdate him (e.g., West [1995] 208-9; Ballabriga [1990] 22-25; Bethe [1922] 303-10). Explicit direct quotation of an epic verse first occurs in the late sixth century, in Simonides (eleg. fr.8 West); even if the fragment belongs to the late seventh-century Semonides, as Latacz claims (1996) 59-60, we can infer only that the line was already part of the poetic tradition, not that the *Iliad* existed. It is another century before we find the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* mentioned by title (Herodotos 2.116-17; 4.29).

13. So also West (1995) 205; Seaford (1994) 145; contra Latacz (1996) 61-63; Graham (1995) 6-7; Powell (1991) 208-9. The next earliest evidence (highlighted by West [1988] 151-2 n.9; [1995] 206-7) comes c. 600 BC: a fragment of Alkaios (fr. 44 L-P) describes Akhilleus' appeal to Thetis, and Thetis' appeal to Zeus, which are vital to the plot of the *Iliad*. Even this strictly proves only that the outline of the story of the *Iliad* was current.

14. On heroic scenes in Greek art, see Snodgrass (1997) esp. 578-79 (on the Cyclops vases, used as a dating criterion by, for example, Graham [1995] 7); Ahlberg-Cornell (1992); Fittschen (1969); Johansen (1967). Those who favour a later date for the composition of the poems insist that scenes specifically drawn from our epics are not identifiable until the late *sixth* century: Seaford (1994) 1-16; Stanley (1993) 279; Ballabriga (1990) 19-20; Jensen (1980) 102-06.

tens of thousands of verses that make up the two poems, and aimed to give performances that were word perfect, as well as theatrical enough to move their audience to tears. Many belonged to a group calling itself "The Sons of Homer" (*Homeridai*), a guild of rhapsodes based on Chios, which presumably provided its members with training. As professionals, they were regarded with disdain by the upper classes, who themselves had to memorize a fair bit of epic in their schooldays but remained strictly amateurs in the field. Nevertheless, competitions for rhapsodes were a regular feature at major religious festivals, and once every four years, at the Great Panathenaia, a relay of rhapsodes performed the whole of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

The institution of this relay performance is, for us, a crucial moment in the history of the epics, since it is the earliest point at which we can be certain of the existence of both works as we know them. Most of our sources attribute the innovation to Peisistratos, the sixth-century tyrant of Athens, but one text plausibly gives the credit to the tyrant's son, Hipparkhos, a patron of the arts and something of a poet himself. A likely occasion would therefore be the Panathenaia of 534 or 530 BC, in the last phase of Peisistratos' career, when his sons would already have played an active public role. If we ignore the reference to Hipparkhos, the institution might go back another generation, to the general reorganization of the festival in 566 BC. Whoever was responsible, the sources stress that he also arranged for the poems to be written down, and it appears that the texts produced by this "Peisistratean recension" acquired authorative status in Greece.[15]

Were there written texts of the epics before this? Since our sources think that the epics were written down by the legendary Homer himself, they are forced to assume that in the course of time the originals had somehow been taken apart, and that Peisistratos or his son had the scattered fragments reassembled. This is an extremely unlikely scenario, no doubt inspired by the observation that rhapsodes normally performed only short extracts from the poems. Much more probably, Hipparkhos or his father simply asked a contemporary organisation of rhapsodes to produce the texts we have. The rhapsodes involved may have possessed written texts already, and need have done no more than allow these to be adopted integrally as the official Athenian version. Alternatively, the poems may have been preserved in memory without being written down, until this very occasion.[16] But, written or oral, the traditional texts were not completely fixed; until the Athenians intervened, they were open to at least minor changes.

15. Performance every fourth year, instituted by earlier generations: Lykourgos, *Against Leokrates* 102. Attribution to Hipparkhos: [Plato], *Hipparkhos* 228b-229b; to Peisistratos: e.g., Cicero, *De Oratore* 3.34.137; Strabo 9.1.10; Pausanias 7.26.13; Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.2.10, 12; Aelianos, *VH* 13.14. Jensen (1980) has sources in full. Occasional attributions to Solon (Plutarch, *Solon* 10; Diogenes Laertius 1.48, 57) derive from the fact that a couple of lines from the *Iliad* were believed to have played a part in a political dispute of Solon's time (see below).

16. The preexistence of a written text is (rightly, I believe) assumed by most scholars. Writing down in sixth century of texts already (more or less) "fixed" in oral tradition: Cook (1995) 3; Seaford (1994) 144-54; Stanley (1993) 284-91; Nagy (1992) 45-51; Kirk (1962) 301-02. Largely new sixth-century composition: see below, n.20.

Sixth-century rhapsodes could do more than memorize established texts: some were also creative poets. Kynaithos, the most famous "Son of Homer" of his day, composed a 178-1ine *Hymn to Delian Apollo,* commissioned by another tyrant, Polykrates of Samos, perhaps in 522 BC.[17] The fact that the author was known did not prevent his work from being attributed to Homer, and the attribution is encouraged by the poem itself, with its closing reference to the author as "a blind man, who lives in Chios," the composer of "songs which will be supreme ever after" (172-73), which could only mean Homer himself. Thirty-three other hymns to the gods survive, all serving as prologues to songs about heroes, all attributed to Homer, and most, if not all, the work of rhapsodes.[18] Rhapsodes, it seems, presented all their poetry, new compositions along with memorized traditional material, as the work of the old master.

In these circumstances, it would not be surprising if they made an occasional contribution to the body of the epics, too, and we are indeed told that "Kynaithos and his associates ... composed many verses and inserted them into Homer's poems." In view of their date, it is significant that this is said about Kynaithos and his contemporaries but not about rhapsodes in general. Kynaithos must have been famous by 522 BC, but was young enough to be still performing twenty years later, in Sicily.[19] His generation was thus the first *after* the Athenian *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were set down (if we accept 534 or 530 BC as the most likely date for this event) and marked a transitional stage in the history of the epics. Previously, in the absence of widely known, definitive texts against which their performances could be measured, rhapsodes had been able to insert their own verses while claiming to give word-for-word renditions of Homer's originals. Kynaithos and friends simply continued that practice, but faced the first generation of audiences to become familiar with a rigidly fixed, official text, and hence the first to notice when singers departed from it. Soon, creativity on the part of the performer was no longer tolerated, and by the fifth century rhapsodes were reduced strictly to rendering memorized poems.

How large was the contribution made by rhapsodes before the late sixth century? It is most unlikely—though it has sometimes been suggested—that the oral tradition remained highly flexible, and produced only relatively short poems, until some exceptionally skilled rhapsode was commissioned to create the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* specifically for the Panathenaia.[20] If this were so, rhapsodes throughout Greece would have been obliged to learn two new poems,

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17. Scholion C to Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 2.1; see Ballabriga (1990) 17-18; Burkert (1979).

18. Most *Hymns* end with a reference to "another song" to follow; twice the reference is specifically to a song about heroes (31.18-19 and 32.18-19); there is one appeal to the god to help the singer "win this contest" (6.19-20). See below on Terpander.

19. Scholion C to Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 2.1, mentions both the insertion of verses (see also scholion E) and the performance in Syrakuse in the 69th Olympiad (504-501 BC).

20. So Ballabriga (1990) esp. 26-29; Sealey (1990) 129-31; Jensen (1980); Bethe (1914) 50-55; (1922) 294-371. Jensen (1980) 153-54, attributes their composition to Kynaithos himself (with Onomakritos as his scribe: ibid, 160-66), but if so, given that our sources seem to know quite a bit about both these figures, it is odd that there is never any mention of their role in publishing "Homer," which would surely have been their greatest claim to fame.

vastly larger than anything else in their repertoire and demanding a previously unheard-of standard of memorization, merely to be able to compete at one Athenian festival. It is hard to see what might have induced them to do that.

Much more probably, the texts were already largely established, and rhapsodes confined themselves to what is implied by the accusation that they "inserted verses": they did not engage in wholesale innovation, but tinkered with a traditional text to suit the occasion of any particular performance. We might therefore expect to find some tailor-made topical references to sixth-century Athens and its festivals if our text was indeed created for the Panathenaia, but have no reason to think that adaptations by rhapsodes would have a cumulative, or otherwise significant, effect on the content of the poems.

Contests between rhapsodes are first attested at the very beginning of the sixth century, when they were banned from Sikyon because its tyrant disliked the constant references in "Homeric verses" to Argos, his city's enemy (Herodotos 5.67). Classical sources imagine that earlier still Homer himself had operated much like a rhapsode. Pindar speaks of the poet as singing of heroes "leaning on his *rhabdos*," the staff which was the badge of Classical rhapsodes (*Isthmian* 4.41-3). A *Life of Homer,* attributed to Herodotos, imagines the poet making a living alternately as a schoolteacher (4-5, 24-25) and as a professional performer, singing in workshops (9-10) and in the community halls where old men spend their leisure time (12, 15). All this, however, is entirely at odds with the portrayal of epic poets in the *Odyssey.* At some point the performance of the poems appears to have changed in nature.

The Composition of Iliad and Odyssey: Terpander and the Seventh Century

IN THE *ODYSSEY,* singers are not equipped with a *rhabdos,* but with a lyre, on which they accompany themselves. They perform songs of the Trojan War, not in public, before a popular audience, but at private feasts, before an audience of aristocrats.[21] They boast, not of their skill in memorization, but of the divine inspiration that enables them to sing accurately of distant events, while their audiences demand "whatever is the newest song" (1.351-52), and feel free to make requests for specific topics (8.492-95). Far from being regarded with disdain, epic poets are shown the greatest respect by their upper-class hosts, who pay them high compliments and offer them choice shares of the feast. The poet will have exaggerated the prestige of the singer, but he would hardly have invented a manner and milieu of epic performance wholly unlike his own. Just as Classical Greeks pictured Homer as a rhapsode because that was the only kind of epic singer they knew, so the poet of the *Odyssey* projected into the heroic past an idealized version of his own situation.

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21. Only one song is performed in public, accompanied by dancing (*Od.* 8.256-369), and, in view of the argument set out below, it is significant that this public song is in effect a hymn to Hephaistos, rather than an epic song about heroes.

We thus need to date and explain three major changes in epic performance before the early sixth century: a shift from improvisation to memorization, an abandonment of musical accompaniment, and a transfer from aristocratic to broader audiences. The date is narrowed down somewhat by two graffiti of c. 740-720 BC, scratched onto a jar for ladling wine and a drinking cup, which contain verses about drinking and dancing, composed in hexameters, the metre of epic poetry. One, already mentioned, even parodies heroic subject matter when it jokingly alludes to the Cup of Nestor.[22] These inscriptions suggest that in the late eighth century epic songs were still performed at feasts.

As it happens, we hear of a poet who bridged the divide between traditional epic performer and rhapsode. This is Terpander of Lesbos, variously dated between 676 and 641 BC.[23] His semilegendary status means that we cannot take on trust what we are told about him, but the information we have is consistent and not implausible in itself, and it is safe to say that at the very least he represented a *type of poet* known in early Greece. He was thought of as a highly creative artist, who introduced a range of new melodies for the lyre, and indeed a new type of lyre, with seven strings rather than the traditional four. His audience was primarily aristocratic, since Pindar, the earliest source to mention Terpander, calls him the inventor of the melodies and the musical instrument used in a game typical of aristocratic conviviality, the singing of *skolia,* which were performed in such a way that each participant had to continue wherever the previous singer chose to leave off.[24] Hardly anything survives of his own poetry because he was, we are told, above all a performer of "the poems of Homer," which he sang to the accompaniment of the lyre.[25] Terpander, then, was—or at any rate was imagined as being—a bard in the Homeric mould.

At the same time, Terpander is the first poet on record to have performed epic poetry in competition at religious festivals and to have composed hymns to the gods as prologues for such performances. He was said to have been the

22. Nestor's Cup: see above, n.13; Murray (1994). Dipylon oinochoe: Jeffery (1990) 68; Chadwick (1996) 218-21, however, argues that the context is not convivial but funerary.

23. The evidence for Terpander is conveniently gathered by Campbell (1988) 294-313, and his numbers for the testimonia will be given at the end of each of the following few notes. Hellanikos (*FGrHist* 4 F 85ab) claimed that Terpander was born in the time of Midas (738-696) and listed him as first victor in the Spartan Karneia (in the 26th Olympiad, 676-73). The *Marmor Parium* (*FGrHist* 239 A 34) dates his introduction of a new style of music to 645/4, Eusebios, *Chron.* Ol. 34.3 (or 34.4) dates the peak of his career to 642/1 (or 641/0). Glaukos of Rhegion (*FHG* ii, 23 F 2) placed Terpander before Arkhilokhos, but Phanias (fr.33 Wehrli) placed him later. The odd one out is the third-century philosopher Hieronymos (fr.33 Wehrli), who dated him to the time of the legendary lawgiver Lykourgos. (*Testimonia* 2-6 Campbell.)

24. New melodies and new lyre: Suda, s.v. *Terpandros.* New melodies: *Marmor Parium* (*FGrHist* 239 A 34); Pollux 4.66; [Plutarch], On *Music* 1132cd, 1140f. New lyre: Terpander fr. 6 Campbell; Aristotle, *Problemata* 920a; [Plutarch], On *Music* 1141c; cf. Timotheus, *Persians* 221 K (10 strings), and Plutarch, *Moralia* 238c = *Inst. Lak.* 17 (one extra string). Invention of *skolia* and *barbitos*: Pindar frr.124b, 125 S-M (cited by Athenaios 635de); [Plutarch], On *Music* 1140f. (*Testimonia* 1, 3, 12-20 Campbell.)

25. Herakleides of Pontos, the fourth-century philosopher, said "that Terpander . . . setting to music his own hexameters and Homer's, sang them in contests" (fr. 157 Wehrli, cited in [Plutarch], On *Music* 1132c); the first-century scholar Alexander Polyhistor said "that Terpander imitated the hexameters of Homer" (*FGrHist* 273 F 77, cited in [Plutarch], On *Music* 1132f); Plutarch described him as "the best singer to the lyre of his day and a praiser of the deeds of heroes" (*Moralia* 238c = *Inst. Lak.* 17). Terpander's role as a performer of Homeric epic may have inspired the idea that he was a great-grandson of Homer himself (Suda, s.v. *Terpandros*). (*Testimonia* 1, 17-18, 21 Campbell.)

winner of the first ever song contest at the Karneia, a festival of Apollo, in Sparta in 675 BC, and four times winner of the reputedly oldest song contest in Greece, the hymn-singing for Apollo at Delphi. Several surviving fragments, which may or may not be genuine, fit that picture perfectly.[26] Our poet here comes close to performing epic in the manner of a rhapsode, except that he still sings to lyre music.

In Terpander, therefore, we may have a representative of another transitional phase in the history of the epics, a time when they first moved out of the sphere of private aristocratic feasting into the public and religious sphere, and when they first began to be suitably prefaced by hymns to the gods honoured by their performance.

Why this should have happened is best understood in the light of the transformation of aristocratic banquets in the course of the seventh century. The feast as it is decribed in the epics, relatively austere and focused on the sharing of meat, turned into the *symposion,* a luxurious and leisurely drinking party, characteristic of the Archaic and Classical periods. The custom of reclining on couches alluded to in seventh-century poetry, instead of sitting on chairs or stools as diners do in the epics, is a tangible expression of the change. Most significant for our purposes is that songs in a variety of metres and on a variety of topics (from martial exhortation and political advice to wine and sex) began to be performed, to the accompaniment of the lyre or an oboe-like instrument (*aulos*), not by professional singers, but by the dinner guests and drinking companions themselves. As already noted, Terpander was believed to have contributed much to the new culture.

Admittedly, the *Iliad* already hints at upper-class amateurs singing to the lyre (3.54; 9.186-91), and the *Odyssey* may well exaggerate the predominance of the professional epic singer over other forms of entertainment at aristocratic feasts. Still, it can hardly be a coincidence that, just like Terpander, the earliest surviving examples of the "new" forms of poetry, the elegiac songs of Arkhilokhos and Kallinos, date to c. 680-640 BC. Around that time, a significant swing towards such songs as the preferred form of elite entertainment must have taken place, at the expense of epic.

Since another general trend of the seventh century is the further development of the Greek city-state as a political, social, and religious organization actively involving all its citizens, rather than primarily the aristocracy, the pressures would all have been pointing the same way. New aristocratic habits meant a loss of upper-class interests in epic song just as emerging forms of

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26. [Plutarch], *On Music* 1132d (T19 Campbell): "Terpander also composed prologues in hexameters to be sung to the lyre;" [Plutarch], *On Music* 1133c (Terpander fr.8 Campbell): ancient singers to the lyre, "acquitting themselves of their obligations to the gods as they liked, immediately went on to the poetry of Homer and the others. This is clear from the prologues of Terpander." Performance at contests, see n.25; specifically at the Karneia, see n.23; winner at Pythia: [Plutarch], *On Music* 1132e (T6 Campbell). [Plutarch], *On Music* 1134b, attributing to Terpander the "first organization of matters concerning music in Sparta," may mean the institution of the song contest at the Karneia itself. Terpander fr.1 Campbell is part of a line from a Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* (21.1) which the Hellenistic scholar Aristarkhos attributed to Terpander; frr.2, 6 and 7 are hexameters addressing Apollo and referring to Sparta and would fit the bill, too.

collective religious activity needed new ways of celebrating. The transfer of
Homeric poetry from one sphere to the other filled the gap. It is in the nature
of ritual to preserve its forms unchanged, and the adoption of epic poetry into
religious ceremonies would have tended to limit creative contributions to the
tradition. At the same time, poets were in any case turning their creative ener-
gies to genres of poetry other than epic. Both pressures again point the same
way: to a "freezing" of the oral tradition during, or soon after, the generation
of Terpander and Arkhilokhos, and the transformation of epic performers into
memorizers first and foremost. The abandonment of the lyre-playing skills
associated with creative poets is likely to have followed soon.[27]

This scenario, based on external evidence not previously considered by
scholars, thus supplies a possible date—the mid-seventh century—as well as
a plausible reason for the composition of our epics. The process may well
have involved the writing down of the poems, since it is, after all, at precisely
this time that many other forms of poetry were first put in writing, too. Their
composer, unfortunately, remains unknown. We may call him the "monu-
mental" poet, as scholars often do, and we may even for the sake of conve-
nience call him "Homer," provided we remember that he is not the Homer of
Greek legend. If he needed encouragement to give the epic tradition a fixed
form, this would surely have come from his fellow singers: rhapsodes' guilds
presumably began to emerge when the social function of epic song was trans-
formed, and their members would have gained a competitive edge from
access to exceptionally fine poems to memorize and perform.[28]

The Oral Tradition Transformed: Hero Cult and the Eighth Century

THEIR USE OF formulaic material proves that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were crafted
out of an oral poetic tradition, and the nature of the formulas proves that this
tradition had its origins long before the seventh century. Some lines and
phrases do not scan properly unless pronounced as they would have been at an
earlier stage of the development of the Greek language. Of course, one can
hardly expect every single line to scan flawlessly, but the more common a for-
mula, the less likely it is that imperfect scansion is an accident. It seems pretty

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27. Euripides, *Alkestis* 455ff., suggests that "hymns without lyre music" were performed at the Karneia by
the late fifth century. Perhaps the end of the dominance at the Karneia of Lesbian singers to the lyre, referred
to by [Plutarch], *On Music* 1133d (who names two singers after Terpander), came when lyre accompaniment
was abandoned at this festival.

28. The importance of the religious contexts in which epics were performed has recently begun to be rec-
ognized. Taplin (1992) 39-41, too, argues that the most likely reason for the composition of our epics is per-
formance at seventh-century religious festivals; Nagy (1995) uses comparative evidence from India to suggest
that adoption at a festival is a key factor in gaining more than local recognition for an epic; Janko (1990) 329
raises (but dismisses) the idea that a ritual function might encourage a freezing of the oral tradition. Note that
Carter (1995) envisages performance at religious festivals already in the Bronze Age (but cannot explain the
very different setting suggested by the poems themselves). Stanley (1993) 291-93 notes that writing down the
epics might have benefited the guild. Of all the *known* poets of the mid-seventh century, Terpander himself is
the most plausible candidate for the role of monumental composer, but this composer may equally be a poet
who has remained anonymous, and it is even possible that the epics were created by several members of a
guild in close collaboration: Seaford (1994) 151-52.

certain, for instance, that several phrases were created when the language still had a consonant H, which by the time our first texts appear in the eighth century was apparently no longer pronounced anywhere in Greece. It follows not only that the poetic tradition had earlier origins, but that it was conservative enough to retain archaic elements, even at the expense of fluency.[29]

When the tradition began is difficult to determine. Some of the old linguistic forms it retained had existed in Mycenaean Greek, but since we do not know how far into the intervening Dark Age these forms may have lasted, we cannot be sure that the tradition originated in the Mycenaean period itself. For a couple of formulas, it has been argued that they only work with an *early* Mycenaean pronunciation, which would mean that the tradition went back to before c. 1400 BC. Bearing in mind that the nature of early Mycenaean Greek is purely hypothetical, one ought to hesitate before accepting this theory and the implication that lines which no longer scanned were nevertheless retained for at least 600 years out of sheer conservatism, but it has to be accepted as a possibility.[30]

A conclusion sometimes drawn from this linguistic evidence for the conservation of archaic elements is that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* must be a patchwork of material composed at very different periods, a jumble of early and late Mycenaean formulas, Dark Age lines, and eighth-century passages.[31] Yet the bulk of the epics—including, for example, the many long speeches—does not consist of formulas, and the bulk of formulaic material, in turn, cannot be shown to be earlier than the late eighth century. Moreover, after centuries of debate, it is now universally agreed that our epics present narratives of such coherence and sophistication that they cannot represent a mere accumulation of material over several centuries: a major creative effort must have gone into their final composition.

An abundance of comparative evidence shows that oral traditions in general do tend to be flexible. Those who pass on a story or poem will insist that their version is true to the original, but this by no means excludes constant, mostly unconscious, adaptation of the tradition. Changing values, new customs, altered political circumstances: anything that impinges on the lives of the storyteller and his audience may find its way into the tale. Indeed, a tradition which does not change with the world will simply not ring true.[32] It is therefore likely that the epic tradition, while preserving some older material, received a new incarnation in the hands of every successive generation of creative oral poets.

From the last third of the eighth century onwards, the oral tradition is likely to have seen particularly radical changes: a major historical develop-

29. For a comprehensive and clear survey of the issues: Ruijgh (1995). Perhaps most influential, recently, has been West (1988).

30. Ruijgh (1995) 63-92; West (1988) 156-59. Sceptical comment: Chadwick (1990) 176-77.

31. Sherratt (1990) esp. 817-20; Snodgrass (1974); Kirk (1960); Page (1959), 218-96.

32. See, e.g., Thomas (1992), Edwards (1990), Morris (1986), 83-91, drawing on Vansina (1985), (1965); Finnegan (1977); and Goody and Watt (1968).

ment of the age, the spread of "hero" cult, indicates a great surge of interest in the heroic past.

In Greek terms, a hero (*hêrôs*/ἥρως) was a mortal who after his death obtained semidivine status and offered protection in return for worship at his tomb. There had long been tomb cult at the graves of ancestors and famous men, but a new phenomenon of the late eighth century was the institution of worship at ancient, usually Mycenaean, tombs where previously there had been none. This type of hero cult will have been driven by a changed attitude to the past, a new desire to exploit the remains of an earlier civilization for the expression of family, class, or community identities. Although it has been argued that its spread must have been prompted by the popularity of our epics, this is unlikely, because the particular sites and objects of worship bear little direct relation to the heroes of epic.[33]

At a more general level, however, the new religious, social, and political importance of heroes could not have failed to affect the songs sung and stories told about them. It is a remarkable feature of the epics that their heroes are not simply outstanding mortals, but living *hêrôes* in the Greek sense. Strikingly, in the *Iliad,* as in later poetry, they are portrayed as members of a race of "demigods," which had subsequently become extinct.[34] That is obviously not how the Mycenaeans saw themselves, and we may ask where this notion came from. Early tomb cult suggests that the idea of individual warriors attaining "heroic" status after death goes a long way back. The notion of an entire vanished race of such heroes, by contrast, must surely have evolved in the late eighth century, when we first meet the habit of treating *all* anonymous ancient tombs as potential places of worship. The spread of hero cult, then, appears to have been responsible for introducing into the epic tradition, at a very late stage, a fundamentally new conception of its heroes.

We can only speculate what further changes this may have entailed, but it seems likely enough that the new-found prestige of the heroes from this point onwards would have stimulated the composition of longer and richer poems, which over the next two or three generations reached the exceptional scale and detail of our epics. That at least some older material survived is undeniable, but from c. 735 BC onwards changing attitudes to the heroic past must have transformed the epic tradition—perhaps beyond recognition.[35]

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33. Rise of hero cult: De Polignac (1995) 138-43; Antonaccio (1995); Morris (1988); Snodgrass (1988); Whitley (1988). The idea that the spread of epic poetry was responsible for the rise of hero cult and an interest in the heroic past was mooted by Coldstream (1976); (1977) 341-48 and supported by Latacz (1988) 160-41 and West (1988) 151; (1995) 205, but the reverse relationship has since been suggested by others (see below, n.35). The spread of cult at Mycenaean graves from c. 735 BC (De Polignac [1995] 138) is most significant for our purposes; other expressions of interest in the heroic past appear rather earlier, c. 750 BC.

34. *Il.* 12.22-23; Hesiod, *W&D* 156-73, Alkaios fr.42.13-16 West; *Homeric Hymns* 31 and 32. The passage in the *Iliad* is the only explicit statement in the epics on the nature of the heroes, but cannot be explained away as a "late" addition, since everywhere in the poems it is evident that the heroes have superhuman strength and close contact with the gods, both of which are surely meant to indicate their semidivine status. See below, n.35.

35. The likelihood that the rise of hero cult had a significant impact on the epic tradition has been noted by Raaflaub (1998); Crielaard (1995) 266-73; Seaford (1994) 180-90; Patzek (1992) 137-43, 159-85; Tausend (1990); Kullmann (1988) 186.

THE HISTORY OF the epics thus begins with a tradition of orally composed poems, performed at aristocratic feasts, possibly of very early origin, but subject to considerable change. These poems grow in importance and scale in the late eighth century, but remain the preferred entertainment of the upper classes for only two more generations, after which they begin to lose their place to the poetry and drinking games of the *symposion*. From c. 675 BC onwards, public religious festivals become the main stage for the epic tradi-tion, and it soon loses its flexibility. Around the middle of the seventh cen-tury, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are composed, probably in writing, and subsequently performed with only minor additions: prefatory hymns and occasional "topical" references. In the 530s, they are adopted as the poems to be performed at the Panathenaia, and derive such authority from this that within a generation not even slight deviations are tolerated any longer.

For the study of the epics as historical sources this means that one may have to reckon with verses which might have been composed with an eye to sixth-century performance and with formulas which might go back to a pre-historic stage of the oral tradition, but that most of our material is likely to be the creation of poets of between 735 and 640 BC. What we may expect to find in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* then, are first and foremost the ideas about the past, the fantasies, the ideologies, and the realities of these three generations.

The Worlds of Homer and Early Greece: Poetry and History

FOR GREECE IN the late eighth and early seventh centuries BC, we have a range of sources besides our epics. Archaeological evidence from tombs, set-tlements, and sanctuaries, along with iconographical evidence from vase painting, sculpture, and other works of art, reveals much about the material world and casts some light on the society and culture of the age. The works of Hesiod and the fragments of seventh-century poets, as well as the earliest inscriptions, throw further light, even if they are by no means straightforward historical sources themselves. We may cautiously draw also on Classical, Hellenistic, and later literary evidence, which offers what it believes to be historical information about Greece in the Dark and Archaic ages. Finally, the history of other periods and the anthropology of other societies present models which, used in conjunction with our sources, may help us understand the world of early Greece.

The question is how we should set about using the Homeric epics to sup-plement this evidence, and indeed whether the epics *can* supplement it with anything of historical use. A brief survey of some key features of the heroic world may serve to illustrate the nature of the epic material and highlight its potential, as well as its problems, for the historian.

Homeric Geography
One passage in the *Iliad*'s *Catalogue of Ships* presents a feature of political geography which makes sense only in the light of sixth-century conditions. The Athenian entry in this catalogue (2.546-56) has a two-line appendix in

which we are told that Aias of Salamis "stationed his men where the Athenian troops were standing" (2.557-58). That seems very short shrift for Aias, the second greatest warrior of the Greeks, and is inconsistent with several other passages in the *Iliad* describing the location of his troops. Another peculiarity is that Athens' neighbour Megara, a city of some importance in the eighth and seventh centuries, does not feature in the catalogue at all. Since we know that in the early sixth century Athens won a hard-fought war against Megara for control of Salamis, an explanation lies to hand: these verses were composed by a rhapsode and added to the poem when it was adopted for performance at the Panathenaia, to reflect and reinforce Athenian claims at the expense of their rivals.[36]

Elsewhere, all recent studies agree, Homeric geography largely mirrors the landscapes and settlements of the late eighth or seventh century, despite earlier attempts to show that it corresponds to the geography of Mycenaean Greece.[37] To give but a few clear-cut instances, repeated references in the *Odyssey* to "the Sicilians" as trading partners, alongside passages revealing an interest in where and how to start new settlements, can hardly predate the wave of Greek settlement in the West which started c. 750 BC, or the first settlement in Sicily itself, c. 735 BC.[38] Both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* tacitly assume that the region of Messenia is part of Spartan territory, which, according to later literary sources, was the case only after the First Messenian War, believed to have ended about 725 BC.[39] When, in the *Iliad*, Akhilleus casts around for names of fabulously wealthy places, he picks "Egyptian Thebes" (Luxor/Karnak) and the temple of Apollo at Delphi (9.381-84, 404-5). Egyptian sources show that "Thebes" had not been a prominent city for 650 years when it again became the capital of Egypt in 715 BC; archaeological

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36. *Il.* 2.557-58 is inconsistent with 8.224 = 11.7; 4.273-84 and 327-28; 13.681-82. Later insertion under Peisistratos was already suspected in antiquity (Strabo 9.1.10, citing the Megarian version of the two lines), but more often (surely wrongly) attributed to Solon as leader in the war against Megara (see above n.15). The whole Athenian entry is unique in naming only the city of Athens while ignoring the other major towns of the region, and may have been revised for the occasion.

37. The geography of Greece is set out in most detail in the *Catalogue of Ships* (*Il.* 2.484, 770), studied in great detail by Visser (1997) and Kirk (1990) 168-240, and more briefly by Anderson (1995) and Patzek (1992). See Giovannini (1969) for a well-argued case against those such as Page (1959) 118-77, Hope Simpson and Lazenby (1970) who would see in the *Catalogue* primarily a reflection of Mycenaean geography. For surveys of Homeric knowledge of the world outside Greece: Crielaard (1995) 224-35; Dickie (1995) 35-51.

38. Interest in overseas settlement: *Od.* 6.4-10, 9.116-41; "Sicilians" (*Sikeloi*) as trading partners: *Od.* 20.381-83; travel to "Sikania," another name for Sicily: 24.306-07; note also the "old Sicilian woman" who is a slave of Laertes (24.211, 366, 389). Evidence for contact with Italy and Sicily: Crielaard (1995) 231-33, 236-39. Dickie (1995) 35-37, effectively argues against the view of Ballabriga (1990) 26, that the *Odyssey* postdates the Greek settlement in the Lipari Islands (580 BC).

39. "The house of Ortilokhos" (in Pherai, *Od.* 3.488-90) is described as lying in Messenia and Sparta (Lakedaimon) at the same time (*Od.* 21.13-16), and it is the king of Sparta who comes to the aid of Ortilokhos' grandsons in battle (*Il.* 5.541-63). The *Catalogue of Ships* pointedly ignores Messenia, but lists "Messe" as part of the Spartan contingent (*Il.* 2.582); it is perhaps because Pherai and its neighbours are thought of as Spartan territory that Agamemnon can make a gift of them to Akhilleus (*Il.* 9.149-56, 291-98). See Dickie (1995) 36-37; Kullmann (1993) 140-42; (1988) 194-96; Giovannini (1969) 27-28.

evidence shows that at Delphi dedications first appear in any numbers in the eighth century, and were probably neither outstanding nor contained in a temple until the seventh century.[40]

Sometimes, however, the poet makes a conscious effort to reconstruct the geography of the distant past. He attributes great territories and forces to Mycenae and Pylos, despite their humble status in his own day. These territories do not actually correspond to the Mycenaean situation either, but are, it seems, products of the poet's imagination, based on nothing more than the knowledge that these places had been powerful once.[41]

More remarkable is the complete eradication of Greek cities on the coast of Turkey. In reality, there had been Mycenaean Greek settlements in the area, but later Greeks were not aware of this and believed instead that they had first arrived in Asia Minor as a result of an "Ionian migration" several generations after the Trojan War. Accordingly, the *Iliad* avoids all mention of Greek cities when it describes that part of the world, and even makes a point of announcing that Miletos, later the most powerful of Ionian cities, was in the hands of "Karians of barbarian speech," introducing a distinction between barbarians and Greeks which is made nowhere else in the epics (2.867-69). The point is humorously repeated in the *Odyssey*, when the king of the far-western Phaiakians states his belief that Euboia is "the most distant place" (7.321-24): as yet there are no Greeks further east. A similar effort of historical imagination lies behind the reference to a slender young palm tree at the altar of Apollo on Delos, which is surely the ancient sacred tree famous as a landmark in historical times, imagined to have been a mere sapling in the heroic past.[42]

The most remote regions of the heroic world are inevitably populated by fantastic beings, who no doubt embodied the worst fears and highest hopes of Greek travellers, but nearer home Homeric geography combines unthinking representation of the world as it was at the time of composition with an occasional self-conscious attempt at plausible reconstruction of the world as it was believed to have been long ago. Our external evidence, along with internal analysis of the epics, enables us to tell apart pure fantasy, likely instances of historical imagination, and Athenian-inspired adaptations of later date: what remains we may cautiously treat as evidence for early Greece.

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40. "Egyptian Thebes": Burkert (1976); his argument that the reference to its wealth must date to after the sack of the city in 663 BC is less compelling, but reinforced by the attractive recent suggestion by West (1995) 211-18, that the washing away of the Greek fortification wall at Troy (*Il.* 12.8-33) might be based on a parallel sequence of events at Babylon in 689 and 677 BC. Delphi: Morgan (1990), 127 ("Perachora ... attracted a wealth of offerings of all descriptions unequalled at Delphi until the seventh century": 143-44).

41. For the odd kingdom attributed to Agamemnon, and the likelihood that it is a poetic fiction based on the need to give Mycenae a territory in proportion to its impressive (still visible) ruins, without trespassing on the territory of Argos: Kullmann (1993) 133-35, 144; Giovannini (1969) 26-29. Mycenaean texts happen to provide fairly precise information about the geography of Pylos, but there is little overlap with the epics: Luce (1975) 93-94.

42. *Od.* 6.162-3, as interpreted by Taplin (1996).

Homer's Material World

A life-size statue of a seated Athena in the *Iliad* and a golden oil lamp carried by Athena in the *Odyssey* are two objects which may have been introduced specifically for the benefit of the Athenian public at the Panathenaia. No other cult statues of any kind are mentioned in the epics, and there are no surviving instances of large, seated images before c. 650 BC, yet the presence of one in the temple of Athena at Troy is implied by repeated references to a *peplos*, a woman's dress, being placed as an offering "on the knees of fine-haired Athena" (6.90-92, 271-73, 302-03). It is conceivable that this statue found its way into the *Iliad* as a novelty at the time of composition, but the way in which the poet takes its existence and shape for granted, and the fact that the presentation of a *peplos* to Athena was a ceremony central to the celebration of the Panathenaia, rather suggests that the whole episode was revised in the sixth century to include an allusion to the festival at which the poem was performed. The lamp, too, is unique. Since torches and braziers are used everywhere else in the poems, and since lamps are not archaeologically attested until the seventh century, it may have been added as an oblique reference to another feature of Athenian cult: a lamp kept permanently lit for Athena in the temple of Erekhtheus.[43]

Most aspects of material culture, by contrast, match the late eighth and early seventh centuries. What we are told of dress, personal ornament, furniture, and domestic decoration is not so precise that we can positively exclude earlier dates, but fits well with archaeological and iconographical evidence down to the middle of the seventh century, when male dress and the furnishing of dining rooms began to change significantly.[44] The heroes' regular military outfit of bronze helmet, cuirass, greaves, and bronze-faced shield, on the other hand, was standard Greek equipment throughout the Archaic and Classical periods, but is not found before c. 720 BC.[45] Moreover, the figurative and narrative images which adorn several pieces of armour and clothing must reflect a period after the development of narrative art in Greece around the middle of the eighth century. Specifically the intricate ornamental brooch worn by Odysseus and the Gorgon emblem on Agamemnon's shield have no parallels before the early seventh century.[46]

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43. Large, seated cult statue: Crielaard (1995) 263-65; Sale (1994) 98; Lorimer (1950) 442-49, who show that archaeological evidence implies a mid-seventh century date at earliest and that Mycenaean parallels do not exist, *pace* Powell (1991) 206, but consider the late eighth century an outside possibility. Statue and *peplos* as a sixth-century addition: Sealey (1990) 130-31; Lorimer (1950) 442-49; Bethe (1922) 310-20. Lamp: *Od.* 19.33-43; its significance in Athenian cult is noted by Cook (1995) 164-68 (cf. the gratuitous reference to Athena entering "the house of Erekhtheus," *Od.* 7.80-1; and perhaps to the Phrontis cult at Sounion, *Od.* 3.278-83). Mycenaean lamps are known, but none afterwards until c. 700 BC: Lorimer (1950), 509-11 (contra Powell [1991] 201-02).

44. See Van Wees (1998a).

45. See Van Wees (1994) 131-40.

46. Narrative art: Crielaard (1995) 214-24. More abstract and therefore less reliable analogies between the epics and visual art have sometimes been adduced: Bethe (1922) 328, saw similarities in (sixth-century) monumental scale; Taplin (1992) 33-34, sees a shared (seventh-century) dynamism; O'Donnell (1995) argues for parallels in (eighth-century) structure. Brooch (*Od.* 19.226-31): Crielaard (1995) 217; Lorimer (1950) 511-15; Studniczka in Bethe (1922) 385-88; *Gorgoneion* (*Il.* 11.36-37): Burkert (1976) 19; Lorimer (1950) 190-91; Bethe (1922) 323-25. Contra: Kirk (1960) 195-96; Powell (1991) 202-04.

Much remains obscure about the Homeric house, but its central part, an oblong hall with a pitched roof, corresponds to a type of dwelling common throughout the Dark Age and not supplanted by multiroomed, flat-roofed houses until, again, about c. 650 BC.[47] The architecture of towns, by contrast, is more sophisticated than anything the Dark Age has to offer: there are fortification walls and towers, stone altars and temples, streets and public meeting places, all unknown before 800 and uncommon before 700 BC.[48] The last decades of the eighth and the first half of the seventh century thus saw older forms of dress and housing coexisting with new forms of armour and communal architecture, and it is this state of affairs which we find predominantly reflected in the epics.

The material culture of the past is represented, accurately or nearly so, by at least two objects: Meriones' helmet made of scales cut from boars' tusks (*Il.* 10.260-71), a regular piece of Mycenaean armour before 1400 BC, and Nestor's golden cup with bird ornaments on the handles (*Il.* 11.632-37), similar to one found in a shaft grave of the same early Mycenaean period. There are obstacles to what might seem to be the obvious conclusion that these are two "survivals" preserved in the oral tradition for seven centuries or more. Firstly, there is nothing to suggest that the description of either artefact is linguistically old. Secondly, both objects are unique and receive a detailed description, whereas one would have expected the helmet, in particular, to occur more often and without much description if it had been preserved in tradition from a time when such helmets were the norm. The more likely alternative, therefore, is that we have here another conscious attempt at reconstructing the past: with a new interest in ancient tombs would have come a new awareness of ancient artefacts discovered in graves or seen in Mycenaean representations, and a couple of these antiquities found their way into the epic tradition as attributes of heroes. The poets, of course, were not to know that these objects had gone out of use at least two centuries before the age of the heroes who fought at Troy.[49]

Several shields and spears are extraordinarily large, and many arms are made of more precious metals than would have been used in the poet's day—including sword blades and spearheads of bronze, rather than iron, and pieces

47. Morris (1998); Mazarakis-Ainian (1997) esp. 363-67; Lang (1996) 78-117; Van Wees (1992) 41-44, 49-55. Contra: Sherratt (1990) 817-21.

48. Raaflaub (1997) 629-33; (1993) 46-59; (1991) 239-47; Crielaard (1995) 239-65; Sale (1994); Murray (1993) 62-65; Van Wees (1992) 28-36; Scully (1990); Morris (1986) 100-04 (all dealing not only with the material aspects of the *polis,* but also with its political organization; see further below). Before the eighth century, temples existed only in Crete; elsewhere in Greece the earliest temples date to c. 800 BC (at Perachora perhaps 825 BC; the "heroon" at Lefkandi, cited by Powell [1991] 195, is not a temple); the date of the earliest Greek city wall (at Smyrna) has been revised from 850 to 800 BC (Murray [1993] 64). Alleged absence of the *polis* from Homer: Seaford (1994) 1-13; Donlan (1989); (1985); Halverson (1985); Finley (1977); also Winter (1995) 259-60, who, however, attributes it to a denial of contemporary reality in favour of heroic ideology; cf. Kullmann (1995); (1992).

49. Patzek (1992) 193-94, on the helmet (which is, however, a precious heirloom, not an "effective and inexpensive" item), and 197-202, for the cup (also Lorimer [1950] 328-35). "Shining" and "scented" cloth has recently been named as another element of Mycenaean material culture (Shelmerdine [1995]), but there is some later evidence for it, too.

of armour of gold, silver, or even tin, rather than bronze. The result some-
times approximates the reality of the past. Large, so-called "tower" and "fig-
ure-of-eight" shields were at one time used by the Mycenaeans, along with
large thrusting spears, and bronze was of course the metal of which weapons
were made in the Bronze Age. Yet the Homeric picture here owes more to
fantasy than to history. It is the round shape of the smaller contemporary
shield rather than the oblong shape of large Mycenaean shields which is
copied, and we may infer that the poets merely took the shields and spears
familiar to them and inflated these to suitably heroic (if in practice very awk-
ward) proportions.[50] As for bronze, it may be the preferred material for
weapons, but tools are always described as made of iron, although tools, too,
had been made of bronze in the Mycenaean age. We are clearly dealing nei-
ther with a genuine tradition nor with a serious attempt at re-creating the
material culture of the past, but with an imaginative use of precious metals to
enhance the glamour of heroic prestige objects.[51]

Two sixth-century cult objects and two early Mycenaean curiosities aside,
then, the material world of the epics is made up of things that are sometimes
fantastically large and valuable, but otherwise much as they were in the
poet's own experience.

Homer's Political World

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* present a picture of government essentially similar to
the political systems of early Greece, but with an added heroic dimension.
The chief unit of government is in each case the political community consti-
tuted by a town (*polis*). Towns in Homer correspond closely to reality not
only in their public architecture, as noted, but also in scale: seventh-century
Athens could raise a fleet of about fifty warships, which is precisely the num-
ber of ships in the Athenian contingent at Troy.[52]

In the epics, as in early Greece, popular assemblies are often called and
public decisions are notionally made by the people at large, but political
power lies in the hands of aristocrats who dominate assembly proceedings
and may prefer to take decisions in closed council; they also act as judges in
private disputes. In Archaic communities, aristocracies were known by a
range of local names, but the generic term *basileis* ("lords" or "princes")
used in the epics for aristocrats of the heroic age is also used by the poet
Hesiod for those who hold power in his own day and in his own commu-

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50. Raaflaub (1998); Van Wees (1994), 131-33; (1992) 17-21. Contra: e.g., Page (1959) 232-42.
51. Van Wees (1994) 133-34; Patzek (1992) 188-93; Giovannini (1989) 30-32. Contra: e.g., Luce (1975) 58-64.
52. *Polis* in Homer: see above, n.48. Scale: according to Pollux 8.108, each of the 48 *naukrariai* (adminis-
trative units which featured in Solon's laws, and, according to Herodotos 5.71, functioned already in the sev-
enth century) provided one ship. It is likely that Athens already had two "state" vessels as well, giving a total
of 50, as at *Il.* 2.556. Even if this is part of a sixth-century revision of the passage (n.36, above), it confirms the
general realism of the scale (40 or 50 ships being the normal size of a Greek contingent), as does the fact that
the Homeric army is proportionally smaller than the Greek forces at Plataia in 479 BC (Van Wees [1988] 23).
Implied population size: Van Wees (1992) 269-71.

nity.[53] By the middle of the seventh century, aristocratic councils and popular assemblies were turning into formal organizations with regulated member-ship, duties, and privileges, but until this process of institutionalization set in, councils and assemblies were presumably informal, loosely organized bodies much as they are described in Homer.[54]

Heroic communities, however, are ruled by hereditary monarchs, whereas our literary sources, whose information on the subject is admittedly not very abundant or reliable, claim that in most parts of Greece, by the end of the eighth century, kings had been replaced by elected, fixed-term magistrates.[55] Some scholars conclude that Homeric kingship represents the reality of an earlier period, dating perhaps to the ninth century or the very beginning of the eighth.[56] Yet one can see why poets would have given a place to royalty in the heroic world even when it had become rare in the real world. If the Greeks knew anything about Mycenaean governmental structures, it was that there had been kings. All their legends agreed that hereditary monarchs ruled during the heroic age and for centuries afterwards: epic poets, therefore, could hardly have failed to introduce kings into their picture, as part of a con-scious attempt to re-create the past.

On the other hand, the epic picture of kingship, and of leadership more generally, is unlikely to be purely a figment of poetic imagination, since it is consistent in itself and compatible with anthropological models of political organization in simple societies.[57] The obvious models for heroic kingship, I would suggest, were the informal positions of power carved out for them-selves by leading aristocrats of the poet's own world. Features such as the precarious position of Homeric rulers, and the importance of both force and reciprocity in maintaining it, could well be based on power relations among aristocrats in the late eighth or seventh century. The poet's historical imagi-nation thus need not have been taxed beyond substituting a hereditary for a fixed-term position at the top of the hierarchy. This cannot have been a diffi-cult leap to make. By 650 BC, ambitious "tyrants" were making the change not only in thought but in practice when they dispensed with existing magis-tracies and set themselves up as would-be hereditary rulers.

53. Van Wees (1992) 31, 78-89, 274-80; Carlier (1984) 137-240.
54. Raaflaub (1993) 64-68, 81. The earliest evidence for formalization is an inscribed law of Dreros (ML 2), c. 650 BC, which refers to "*demioi*" and "the twenty from the city," presumably formal bodies. Some see hints of formalization already in the epics: Vlachos (1974) 58-65, argues that the council of the Phaiakians is imagined as formalized and representative; Sale (1994) 91-94, argues that the elders at Troy, too, are modelled on a formal council.
55. Best attested are the archons in Athens: as Rhodes (1981) 65-66, shows, there was a tradition that the last king had been Hippomenes, who was succeeded by the first (ten-year) archon in 714/3 BC (and then by annual archons in 683/2). This relatively plausible story was later superseded by one that dated the archonship back to 1069/8.
56. Homeric rulers as Dark Age kings: Finley (1977). As Dark Age "chiefs": Donlan (1998); (1997) 649-67 (dating them to c. 800 BC); (1994); (1982a); (1982b); Qviller (1995); (1981). As Dark Age "big men" (that is to say, leaders whose dominance rests primarily on personal merit, rather than hereditary status): Ulf (1990); Rihll (1992); (1986); Drews (1983). Homeric kings representing a range of different types of ruler: Deger (1970).
57. As those who see in Homeric kings a reflection of Dark Age chieftains have pointed out (see n.56, above); see also Carlier (1984) 137-240; Van Wees (1992) 31-32, 281-98. Kings as a poetic figment: Osborne (1996) 149-51; Dickinson (1986); Geddes (1984).

Relations between rulers and their cities are in the epics normally, and plausibly, conducted through ties of kinship and friendship, by means of gifts and favours, but there are occasional hints in the *Iliad* of an established hierarchy in which the rulers of certain towns have authority over others in their region, and Agamemnon has supreme power over them all. The Greeks, moreover, are presented as a unity, "the Panakhaians," when their enemies are simply a coalition of "Trojans and allies."[58] Here, surely, we are indeed dealing with poetic fantasy: a unified Greece certainly does not correspond to either the current or the Mycenaean situation, nor is it otherwise attested in Greek legend. Yet the fantasy has roots in the contemporary world. From the end of the eighth century, "panhellenic" sanctuaries and festivals, attended by all Greeks and by Greeks alone, began to acquire ever greater importance. Evidently, a sense of Greek cultural identity in opposition to outsiders was emerging, and this new self-awareness was given expression in the fiction of the heroic world as a political unity.

Just like epic geography and material culture, the political world of the epics thus contains an element of fantasy, inspired partly by contemporary ideology and partly by an attempt to re-create the past. But once again fantasy is given only limited scope. So far as we can tell, the epic picture is in almost all respects a reflection of the poet's own world.

Homeric Society, Economy, and Culture

Even in antiquity, when people generally believed that Homer otherwise provided more or less accurate information about the distant past, it was assumed that the poet projected onto his heroes his *own* customs, norms, and values. This idea was the basis of some outrageous theories. One scholar argued that Homer must have been a Roman because his heroes play *pessoi,* the ancient equivalent of draughts, and spontaneously rise from their seats when a superior enters, just as the Romans did. Others claimed that Homer must have been an Egyptian because, like the Egyptians, the heroes "kiss one another on the mouth."[59] Silly as the results may sometimes have been, the principle is sound. As it was put by whoever wrote the *Life of Homer* attributed to Herodotos: "when dealing with the customs practiced among men, it is likely that such a great poet would put in his poems either the best he could find, or else his own ancestral customs" (37).

It is one thing to take liberties with geography and material culture, or make minor changes to the surface of the political system, but quite another for poets to create, and for audiences to understand, a world that differed much from their own in routine behaviour, norms, and values. In these areas the oral tradition would be most responsive to change, and legends would contain the fewest clues for historical reconstruction. One might cite the heroes' concern with honour, *hybris,* and shame, indeed their ethics at large,

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58. Van Wees (1992) 36-40, 57-58; Ulf (1990) 118-25.
59. As reported in the *Vita Homeri Romana.*

or their religious concepts and cult practices: in each of these important respects they are undeniably very close to Archaic and Classical Greeks. Pseudo-Herodotos, for example, believed that he could tell Homer's place of birth by his descriptions of animal sacrifice, since these followed the exact ritual still in use among the Aeolians (ibid.).

But matters are not always so straightforward. Poets would not, or not always, have reproduced their own social world pure and simple. Customs varied considerably from one city to the next and, given the wide circulation of their work, poets might have tried to avoid referring to local peculiarities, creating instead a composite of the "best" Greek customs known to them. What is more, in every society there is a gap between ideal and reality, and it is likely that the heroic world incorporated what was "best," rather than what was "normal," in contemporary society.

Funerary practices, for instance, were an area of custom in which the Greeks were keenly aware of regional differences. This is perhaps why it is so difficult to find an exact parallel for Homeric funerals. Archaeology reveals the existence of many of the basic elements—cremation, interment of ashes in a tomb marked by a burial mound, funeral games to mark the occasion—in both the eighth and seventh centuries and earlier (though not in the Mycenaean period), but the details always differ. There is variation even within the epics: Eëtion is cremated in armour *(Il.* 6.417-18), but no one else is; Patroklos' and Akhilleus' ashes are placed in a golden "amphora" *(Od.* 24.71-79), but Hektor's in a golden "box" *(Od.* 24.792-8). It may well be, therefore, that the poets avoided drawing too closely on any particular form of burial rite, but created a generic heroic funeral which would appeal, and make sense, to a wide audience.[60]

The heroic habit of keeping vast herds and consuming large quantities of meat illustrates how a contemporary ideal may be represented as a historical reality. It has been thought that a pastoral economy may have existed before the eighth century, and that the epics reflect this. However, the Homeric picture is better understood as a wish-fulfilling fantasy of the past. In the Archaic period, when the Greek economy was predominantly agrarian, only rich men kept sizable herds, and meat was eaten as a prestige food; in these circumstances, it would not be surprising if people imagined that long ago men were able to enjoy these luxuries on a scale that in the present day even wealthy men could only dream of. It is worth noting once again that these fantasies are relatively modest: the scale of livestock- and slave-owning in the heroic world does not begin to approach the truly vast proportions reached in the Mycenaean age.[61]

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60. Synthesis of local and regional differences by epic poets: Raaflaub (1997) 627; Nagy (1995) 10; Whitley (1991). The general similarity of late eighth- and seventh-century burials to the epic picture are sometimes explained, conversely, as the result of aristocratic imitation of the imaginary funerals of the epics (Coldstream [1977] 349-52).

61. Dark Age pastoral economy: Donlan (1997) 654-57, 666; Raaflaub (1997) 646-47. For the much larger scale of livestock- and slave-owning in Mycenae, see Carlier (1984) 120-22.

Doubts about the essentially contemporary nature of Homeric society have been raised on the grounds that the epics simultaneously feature the custom—unknown to Classical Greeks, who thought it quaint (Aristotle, *Politics* 1268b38-42)—of offering bridewealth when taking a woman in marriage, and the custom of giving dowries, which continued to be normal practice. One anthropological model suggests that these two customs are not normally compatible. It has been argued, therefore, that the epic tradition here, and perhaps elsewhere, too, presents a composite drawn from two distinct historical periods. The comparative evidence, however, is not conclusive, and since we have found nowhere else any sign of substantial elements preserved from earlier stages of the tradition, we should be surprised to find these in the sphere of social customs and cultural values, of all places. It is much more probable that our epics reflect an unusual historical situation in which dowry and bridewealth coexisted, and that the latter did not fall out of use until after their composition.[62]

Bridewealth is not the only aspect of Homeric society and culture for which there is virtually no evidence outside the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In Homeric concepts of age, gender and class, in the nature of military organization, war and battle, and in relations of kinship, friendship, commensality and gift-giving, there is much that is familiar from Archaic and Classical Greece, but in each of these domains there is also a good deal that is unique to the epics.[63] In principle, it is possible that some, or all, of this is a poetic fiction or a relic from the distant past. Each case must, of course, be judged on its merits. Our survey of the Homeric world, however, has shown that heroizing distortions in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* tend to be limited, moderate, and detectable and that the poems otherwise reflect only contemporary Greece. Thus, unless we find strong arguments to the contrary, we ought to favour the possibility that we are dealing with a range of contemporary customs and ideas which fell into disuse soon after the composition of the poems.

If this is correct, the epics provide us with evidence for significant change in many areas of life in the seventh century BC. Change is evident already in the works of poets of the very generation in which, we have suggested, the epics were composed; indeed, there are a few tantalizing hints of new developments even within the epics themselves.[64] Here, then, lies the greatest potential value of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as historical sources: they preserve for us many aspects of the aristocratic society and culture of which epic poetry used to form a part, but which was being transformed even as the changing social function of epic poetry led to the freezing of the oral tradition and the creation of our poems.

62. Inconsistency in custom: Osborne (1996) 148-49; Snodgrass (1974). Others argue that the two customs *are* compatible: Seaford (1994) 16-17; Perysinakis (1991); Morris (1986) 105-14; Finley (1981) 237-41.

63. Age: Van Wees (1997a); gender and class: Van Wees (1998a); (1998b). For military organization and other aspects of Homeric society, see the overviews of Raaflaub (1997); (1991); Murray (1993); Van Wees (1992); Ulf (1990); Andreev (1988); Finley (1977).

64. I am thinking here of two passages in the *Iliad*: one, I believe, is the only place in the poem where the tactics of phalanx warfare are approximated (17.352-65); the other mentions "tribes and phratries" as combat units and is inconsistent with military organization elsewhere in the poem: Van Wees (1997b) 669-70, 685-86, 691-92.