THE TROJANS AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

Trevor Bryce

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

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In *The Trojans and their Neighbours* the secrets of Troy – one of the most iconic cities in ancient history – are unearthed. Once the lost site of the mythological battle which unfolded in Homer's *Iliad*, the discovery of ancient Troy at Hislarlık has revealed a living, breathing city with a history spanning 4,000 years.

Starting with an account of Troy's part in the *Iliad* and the question of the historicity of the Trojan War, Trevor Bryce shows how the recently discovered Hittite texts illuminate the question that has fascinated scholars and travellers since the Renaissance.

For the first time, Troy's neighbouring communities and allies, for example the Lycians, are brought into the analysis and given equal weight. Encompassing the very latest research, the city and its inhabitants are placed in historical context with their neighbours and contemporaries to form a complete and vivid view of life within the Trojan walls and beyond, from its beginning in *c.*3000 BC to its decline and obscurity in the Byzantine period. Documented here are the archaeological watershed discoveries from the Victorian era to the present that reveal, through Troy's nine levels, the story of a metropolis punctuated by signs of economic prosperity, natural disaster and war.

Trevor Bryce is an Honorary Research Consultant at the University of Queensland and Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. He is the author of numerous works on the ancient Near East. His most recent publications are *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (1998), *Life and Society in the Hittite World* (2002) and *Letters of the Great Kings of the Ancient Near East* (Routledge, 2003).

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First published 2006
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006.

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Bryce, Trevor, 1940–
The Trojans and their neighbours: an introduction/Trevor Bryce.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Troy (Extinct city) – History. 2. Middle East –
History – To 622. I. Title.
DF221.T8B79 2005
939′.21–dc22 2005003604

ISBN10: 0–415–34959–1 (hbk)
ISBN10: 0–415–34955–9 (pbk)
ISBN13: 9–78–0–415–34959–8 (hbk)
ISBN13: 9–78–0–415–34955–0 (pbk)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

τῷ Ὁμήρῳ τῷ ἀρίστῳ καὶ θειοτάτῳ τῶν ποιητῶν

My sincere thanks are due to Dr Michael Apthorp for his advice and comments on a number of Homeric matters; to Dr Chris Mee for his advice on Aegean matters; to Professor David Hawkins, for his photograph of the Karabel monument and permission to use his reproductions of several hieroglyphic inscriptions; to Dr Geoff Tully for his artwork; to the Troja Projekt, University of Tübingen, for permission to use its photograph of the seal found at Hisarlık; and to the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics, University of Queensland, for its most valuable support during the book's preparation.

INTRODUCTION

It is hardly coincidence that the release of the Hollywood blockbuster *Troy* has been followed by a fresh crop of television programmes, books and articles on the Trojan War. Yet there is no need of a Brad Pitt to rekindle interest in one of the greatest stories ever told. Indeed, ever since Homer first recited his poem about Troy's fall, almost 3,000 years ago, there has seldom been a time when the poem's characters and events have not captured popular imagination and given rise to a multitude of spin-offs in art, literature and theatrical productions and, more recently on cinema and television screens.

But the focus of these treatments has been almost invariably a very narrow one. Troy was the city[1] of King Priam and his son Hector.[2] Troy was the city of the so-called Trojan horse (though the horse plays no part in Homer's *Iliad*), the city besieged by an alliance of Greek forces who were led by Agamemnon and whose star performer was Achilles. The war between the Greeks and the Trojans was fought over the abduction or seduction of the Spartan queen Helen by the Trojan prince Paris. Greek tradition assigned a period of ten years to the war. The *Iliad* encompasses only a few weeks of it near its end, and Hollywood reduces the entire conflict to a few days. Yet even if we allow that the war did last for ten years – and it has to be said that Hollywood's drastic reduction of the time frame is much more historically plausible than Greek tradition – this represents only a small fraction of the relevant phase of Troy's history. Scholars now generally agree that Troy Level VI most closely represents the city of the Trojan War. Given that this city lasted more than 400 years, the period dealt with in Greek tradition

occupies less than 10 per cent – very likely a great deal less – of its entire lifespan.

But the sixth city is only one of nine major phases in the history of the site. The first phase began around 3000 BC, the ninth ended around the middle of the first millennium AD. Even after this, Troy, now called Ilium, did not entirely disappear, and as late as the tenth century it *may* have been the seat of a bishopric. That is to say, the history of the site extends over 4,000 years. Yet in popular thought Troy will forever be the city of the Trojan War. Understandably so, for the war is quite simply the site's meal ticket. As in ancient Greek and Roman times, Troy continues to attract large numbers of visitors – as well, today, as substantial funding for its ongoing excavations. Yet it is an unprepossessing site, surprisingly small in the eyes of many first-time visitors who, on paying their entrance fee find themselves confronted with a confusing jumble of walls, fragmentary building foundations and broken pavements, all within an area little bigger than a football field. Deprive it of its legendary associations and it would very likely lose its financial backers and warrant barely a single star in a tourist guidebook.

But there really is much more to Troy than a war which for all its renown may never have taken place. And one of the main purposes of this book is to give a brief survey of the city's history from its first to its last days. There is another purpose as well. When Routledge's editor Richard Stoneman invited me to write a book about Troy, he suggested that the emphasis should be as much on Troy's neighbours as on the Trojans themselves. Hence the title. At that time we both expressed surprise at the dearth of recent books on Troy. Since then I became aware that Professor Latacz's *Troia und Homer* was soon to appear in a revised English version, and I have subsequently heard of several other books on Troy that are currently in preparation. To the best of my knowledge, the focus of all these publications will be on Troy in the Late Bronze Age.

This period also figures fairly prominently in the pages that follow, though the book's overall scope and approach is rather different. Taking on board Richard Stoneman's suggestion, I have given almost as much emphasis to Troy's neighbours as to the Trojans themselves. The word 'neighbours' I have defined in a chronological as well as in a geographical sense. Thus, at any particular stage in Troy's history, I will refer not only to Troy's geographically

proximate neighbours, but also to its contemporaries and near contemporaries further afield – as far afield as Egypt and Mesopotamia. Of course, within the book's 70,000 word limit, it will be impossible to give more than outline surveys of other peoples and places. But brief though these surveys must be, they will, I hope, provide sufficient context for us to address several important questions about Troy: How did Troy compare with its neighbours – culturally, commercially, politically and militarily? What relations did it have with other parts of the contemporary Aegean and Near Eastern worlds? Where did it rank within the hierarchy of the cities and kingdoms of these worlds? Legendary tradition gives the impression that the Trojan War was something like a superhuman clash between Titans. Hollywood represents the war as a conflict between the two mightiest nations on earth. How far does the real Troy measure up to or fall short of these legendary and screen images? To judge from reports of the most recent excavations at Troy, we now have a much better picture of the size and nature of the site as a whole, and can thus make more informed comparisons with other cities and kingdoms that existed during Troy's various ages.

There is a further question. Who *were* the Trojans? We can give a simple response. The Trojans were whoever happened to be living in Troy at any given time. It really depends on what period we're talking about. One could give the same response to the question, Who were the inhabitants of Byzantium/Constantinople/Istanbul? But even if we were to specify a particular period of time for our question, we would still find that cities like Troy and Constantinople had a broad mix of ethnic groups in their populations. There was no such thing as a typical Trojan, or a typical Constantinopolitan. This adds a further dimension to our question. In attempting to identify who the Trojans were, we have to consider which groups of people were likely to have been living in the city at any stated time in its history. There may well have been a predominant ethnic group and a predominant language spoken in the city at a particular time – perhaps Luwian in the Late Bronze Age and Greek in the first millennium BC. But Troy's culture and civilization were almost certainly a blend of a number of different elements, some filtering down from earlier phases in its existence, some the result of cultural and commercial contacts with the wider world, some the result of the intermixture of the various ethnic groups that made up its

population. We cannot provide even a tentative answer to our question without considering the whole spectrum of Trojan history and the wider context of the world to which Troy belonged.

There is another reason for writing this book. Scholarly and popular fascination with Homer's tale has generated a plethora of theories on just about anything and everything to do with Troy and the Trojan War. Many of the theories are ingenious and eloquently argued and have done much to enliven and maintain interest in the topic. Many have been proposed by very reputable scholars, and may well be right. But it is often difficult, particularly for the general reader, to distinguish where hard fact and attractive but unprovable theory part company. Repeat an unsubstantiated theory often enough and persuasively enough, and it will eventually acquire the status of 'established fact'. But for the purposes of serious study, it is important to identify quite clearly what we know about Troy as a matter of fact, what is probable but lacks conclusive proof, and what is pure speculation. There has been a tendency in recent scholarship to drift increasingly into the realms of the last of these. A sober re-evaluation of what our evidence actually tells us will not be untimely.

One final comment. It has become almost de rigueur for books on Troy to have at least a chapter or two devoted to the question of whether or not there really was a Trojan War. The new publications will no doubt engage in fresh attempts to answer this question. Indeed it would be perverse to write a book about Troy and refuse to address it. Clearly that is what the reader expects, no matter how many times the question has been dealt with in the past. In concluding my account with my own reflections on the matter, I have acknowledged this expectation. But I do believe we have reached the stage where nothing more can usefully be said about a possible historical basis for Homer's tale – at least until fresh evidence comes to light. Perhaps we can revisit the whole question if and when archaeologists do succeed in unearthing on the site of Troy proof positive of a war such as Homer describes. But one would be well advised not to hold one's breath.

Trevor Bryce
November, 2004

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THE POET AND THE TRADITION

IN THE BEGINNING

The trouble all began with a wedding. Thetis, a sea nymph, had rejected the amorous advances of Zeus and, as punishment, the father of the gods condemned her to marry a mere mortal, a prince called Peleus from the island of Aegina. To show himself worthy of his divine bride, Peleus had first to defeat her in a wrestling contest, a task which she made more difficult by changing into different shapes during the contest, including fire, water, wind, a lion, a tiger, a snake and various other members of the animal kingdom. Peleus eventually triumphed, plans for the wedding proceeded, and invitations were sent out. It was a distinguished guest list, headed by the gods themselves. Unfortunately the goddess Eris, a name meaning 'Strife', was also present at the celebrations. According to a late tradition, she was not an invited guest but a gatecrasher, and either out of pique at being left off the official guest list, or simply because it was her nature to behave in this way, she sought to disrupt the festivities. With the object of provoking a squabble amongst the female guests, she threw into their midst a golden apple inscribed 'To the Fairest'. Immediately, three goddesses stepped forward to claim the prize: Hera, wife of Zeus; Athena, goddess of war and wisdom (amongst other things); and Aphrodite, goddess of love.

To their credit, none of the trio wished to spoil the happy couple's special day. They agreed to resolve the matter with a beauty contest – but at another time and in another place. Mount Ida in north-western Anatolia and not far from Troy was chosen as the venue for the contest, and Alexander Paris, second son of the Trojan king

Priam was appointed as its judge. Sadly, notions of fair play were not conspicuous amongst the goddesses' qualities and, prior to the judging, each of them secretly approached Paris and attempted to suborn him: Hera promised him rule over all Asia and great wealth if he awarded the contest to her; Athena declared she would endow him with great wisdom and military prowess; Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful woman in the world as his wife. Paris found the third of these offers by far the most appealing (a typical example, some later Greek commentators would say, of Trojan decadence), and so he declared Aphrodite the winner.

The problem with Aphrodite's offer was that the world's most beautiful woman, Helen, was already married – to Menelaus, King of Sparta. But this, the goddess assured Paris, was a mere technicality and would prove no major obstacle. With her help and guidance, the Trojan prince secured an invitation to Sparta where he was regally entertained by Menelaus, and then repaid his host's hospitality by seducing his wife and persuading her to elope with him back to Troy. That created a furore in the Greek world. Prior to her marriage, Helen had been courted by a number of royal suitors, including Menelaus' brother Agamemnon. The suitors made a pact that irrespective of where Helen's choice finally settled, the others would protect her for the rest of their lives. They were now honour-bound to seek her out and restore her to her home in Sparta, whether or not she had left it willingly in the first place. (There was a later tradition that she had been raped and forcibly abducted by Paris.) Hence the genesis of the Greek expedition against Troy.

Agamemnon, King of Mycenae and indisputably the most powerful Greek ruler of the time, sent out a call for support through the whole of Greece. Some 164 kingdoms and communities responded, and an armada of 1,186 ships was mustered under Agamemnon's overall command. The assembly point for this vast fleet was the harbour of Aulis on the coast of Boeotia. But right from the outset there was a problem, for Agamemnon had provoked the wrath of the goddess Artemis, who becalmed the fleet and refused winds to take it to Troy until its commander had sacrificed his daughter Iphigeneia. The sacrifice was duly carried out, and fresh winds carried the fleet across the wine-dark sea to Troy on Anatolia's north-west coast. For Agamemnon there would be a day of reckoning for the killing of his daughter. But that was some years in the future.

The Greeks anchored their fleet in a large bay and set up their camp on the edge of the plain outside Troy's massively fortified citadel. Thereupon began a ten-year investment of the city. It was punctuated by many sorties of Trojan warriors against the Greek besiegers and much waxing and waning of the military fortunes of both sides in the contests fought by the heroes on Troy's increasingly blood-drenched plain. The Greeks' repeated attempts to breach the city's defences ended in failure until finally one of them, Odysseus, hit upon the ruse of the wooden horse, which he persuaded his comrades-in-arms to build. Upon completing it, they tricked the Trojans into thinking that they were abandoning the siege and returning to their own lands. The massive equine edifice which they were leaving behind was, they claimed, intended to expiate a crime they had committed in removing a sacred statue called the Palladium from the citadel of Troy. But instead of returning home, the Greeks merely withdrew their fleet to the nearby island of Tenedos, anchoring well out of sight of Troy.

The Trojans streamed forth onto the plain, and by one means or another were induced to drag the horse up into their citadel as a thank-offering to Athena, breaking down part of the fortifications to do so. Then they abandoned themselves to drunken revelry to celebrate their apparent victory. In the midst of the festivities, the Greeks who had been concealed in the horse's belly quietly let themselves out through a trapdoor and lit pre-arranged signal fires to summon back the fleet. This was the last act in the saga. The Greek forces poured through the breach in the fortifications and created mayhem in the now defenceless city. All its inhabitants were slaughtered or taken prisoner for selling into slavery, and the city itself was plundered and put to the torch.

THE STORY OF THE *ILIAD*

So much for the tale of Troy, a tale forever associated with the name of one man above all others – an epic poet called Homer who lived on or close by Anatolia's western coast, in the region called Ionia in the first millennium BC. The poetic narrative, which he composed and which we know as the *Iliad*, was first recited to audiences at the very dawn of Greek literature, probably in the second half of the eighth century BC. The *Iliad* is in fact our chief source

for the most widely known narrative tradition in the whole of Western literature. From the time of its composition, it has served as a major source of inspiration for successive generations of artists, poets, playwrights, composers of operas and novelists, to say nothing of an ever-increasing cohort of film producers for both television and cinema.

Yet how much of all this can we really attribute to Homer? A great deal of the story we have outlined above makes no appearance at all in the *Iliad*, or at best is referred to only in passing. And far from covering the entire ten-year period of the war, the *Iliad* extends over no more than a few weeks – fifty-one days to be precise – at the very end of the war. Indeed, most of the account, from Books 2 to 22, is confined to just six days (four days of fighting separated by two days of truce). Occasionally the poet inserts references to earlier episodes, as far back as the seduction which sparked the whole thing off (though he mentions this only obliquely), and subsequently the mustering of the Greek fleet in preparation for the assault upon the seducer's homeland. But these are mere passing reminders of the overall context in which the *Iliad* is set. What is more, Homer's story stops short of the climactic event, the actual sack of Troy. To be sure, there are a number of times throughout the poem, especially as it approaches its end, when Troy's destruction is clearly foreshadowed. We are left in no doubt that the city's fate is irrevocably sealed. But the *Iliad* itself is not about the fall of Troy. And for that matter there is not even one mention, in almost 16,000 lines of verse, of what has long and widely been regarded as the war's defining symbol – the Trojan horse.

The narrative of the poem arises out of a dispute that erupted between Agamemnon, Commander-in-Chief of the Greek forces, and Achilles, son of Peleus and Thetis. Of all the Greek heroes at Troy, Achilles is by far the most accomplished and the most feared by the Trojans. The cause of his dispute with Agamemnon seems on the surface a trivial one. During a raiding expedition, the Greeks have seized Chryseis, daughter of a priest of Apollo called Chryses, and have presented her to Agamemnon as his share of the spoils brought back from the raid. When Chryses approaches Agamemnon to buy back his daughter, the Greek commander rudely rejects him. Apollo is outraged and responds by inflicting a devastating plague upon the Greek camp. The plague rages unabated until the prophet

Calchas informs an assembly of the Greek forces summoned by Achilles that the god's anger will only be appeased if Agamemnon gives up his prize.

Grudgingly Agamemnon agrees and demands that Achilles' favourite slave-girl Briseis, awarded to Achilles as a booty-prize, be surrendered to him by way of compensation. Achilles has no option but to hand her over, but he is furious at losing her to Agamemnon and promptly withdraws his services from the Greek forces, retires into his tent and refuses to take any further part in the action until his honour is satisfied. He also begs his mother Thetis to persuade Zeus (who owes her a favour) to turn the conflict the Trojans' way so that his fellow Greeks will realize how essential he is to their victory and will make every effort to give him the satisfaction he demands. Zeus does as he is asked. Things go very badly for the Greeks. Under the leadership of King Priam's eldest son, Hector, the Trojans drive the enemy back to their beached ships, repeatedly inflicting heavy casualties upon them. Desperate attempts are made to bring Achilles back into the battle line. To no avail. Agamemnon's offers of rich gifts and even the offer of the hand of

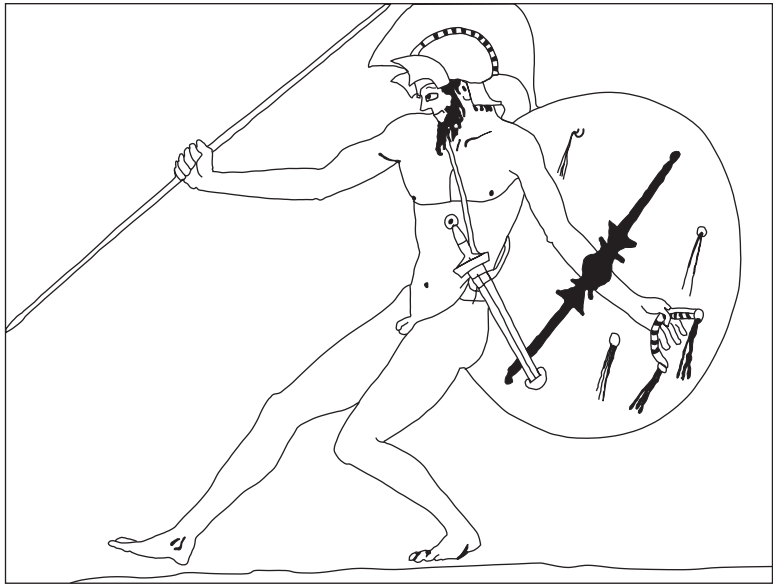

Figure 1.1 Hector, son of Priam.

his daughter in marriage are spurned by the sulking hero. Patroclus too, Achilles' closest and dearest companion, fails to make any significant impact on his friend, though Achilles relents so far as to allow Patroclus to lead his troops and wear his armour into battle.

Ironically and tragically, this provides the catalyst for the return of Achilles. After inflicting much devastation on the Trojan ranks, Patroclus is finally brought down by Hector, with the assistance of Apollo, and killed and stripped of Achilles' armour. In his grief and with his fury now directed against Hector, Achilles is reconciled with Agamemnon and returns to the fray, wearing a new set of armour wrought by the god Hephaestus. Many Trojans fall victim to Achilles, before the Greek superwarrior finally comes face to face with his arch-enemy Hector. Fate has decreed that Hector should die at Achilles' hands, and so it comes to pass. After slaughtering the Trojan prince, Achilles ties his body to his chariot and drags it to his tent. He then turns his attention to the burial of his beloved Patroclus and organizes funeral games in his honour. Following these games, Achilles receives a visit from King Priam who begs for the return of his son's body. Realizing that he himself must soon die and conscious that he too will leave behind a father who will grieve for him, Achilles takes pity on his aged adversary and hands back to him his son's body. With the burial of Hector, the *Iliad* comes to an end. The fall of Troy is imminent. But it has yet to occur.

As the *Iliad*'s opening words make clear, the Wrath of Achilles is Homer's major theme: 'Sing, o goddess, of the wrath of Achilles, Peleus' son'. Given the poem's monumental length and relatively narrow compass, its author has much scope for presenting detailed pictures of the chief participants in the conflict; on the Greek side: Achilles, Agamemnon, Patroclus, the two Ajaxes, Diomedes; on the Trojan side: Hector, Priam, Paris, Aeneas, Sarpedon; as well as brief sketches of a host of minor participants.There is a particular focus on heroic behaviour in the face of death, on the question of how the hero so passionately devoted to life reacts to the certainty and often the imminence of his own death. This is a prospect of which Achilles is particularly conscious, given the sure knowledge that his life will, of his own choosing, be a short and glorious rather than a long and undistinguished one.

An eighth-century poet could draw on a vast store of oral tradition in composing an account of the Trojan War, and there must have

been many bards in the Greek world at this time who preserved, presented and handed on stories that had arisen out of the tradition. Homer himself consciously sought to avoid yet another retelling of already widely known tales. The brief allusions he makes to the events that preceded and followed his narrative make quite clear that the prequels and sequels to his tale were firmly established in the repertoire of stories sung and recited to audiences in the early centuries of the first millennium.

THE EPIC CYCLE

Traces of this repertoire are preserved in fragmentary remains of a group of poems which post-date the *Iliad*'s composition (though some of them are mistakenly attributed to Homer in ancient sources) but are probably no later than the seventh or early sixth century. The group belonged to what is commonly referred to as the epic cycle, which dealt with the legendary wars fought against both Thebes and Troy. Those dealing with the former (considered the earlier) are now completely lost. Fragments of the latter have, however, survived, and include:

(a) the *Cypria*, a poem originally in eleven books, that begins with the lead-up to the war – including the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, the beauty contest judged by Paris and the seduction of Helen – and then narrates the first part of the war, perhaps up to the point where the *Iliad* begins;
(b) the *Little Iliad*, which tells the story of the Trojan horse and the breach of Troy's defences by the Greeks;
(c) the *Iliu Persis* ('Sack of Troy') which tells of the Trojan priest Laocoon's unheeded warnings to his fellow Trojans about the horse, and then describes the sack of the city by the Greeks and their departure after Troy's fall;
(d) the *Nostoi* ('Homecomings') which narrates the journeys home by several of the Greek leaders, including Agamemnon and Menelaus, and what happens when they arrive there.

The various poems making up the epic cycle were eventually organized into a continuous narrative of myth and legend, seasoned here and there with a dash of genuine history, from the world's

beginning to the end of the heroic age. Undoubtedly they reflect surviving elements of the large body of folk tradition and oral narrative poetry in circulation in Homer's own time and probably for many generations before it. From the remains of the epic cycle as well as from the Homeric compositions and other sources, we can reconstruct more or less completely the Trojan War tradition as represented in Greek and Roman art and literature from its alleged first causes, through the various stages of the conflict itself, to the subsequent travels and homecomings of several of its main participants. The post-war adventures of the Greek hero Odysseus as told in the *Odyssey*, the second great epic attributed to Homer, belong to this last category. So too does the homecoming of the ill-fated Agamemnon, whose assassination by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus furnished Greek art and literature with one of its favourite themes.

All this serves to emphasize how highly selective Homer was in his treatment of the tradition. One might have supposed that in limiting his narrative to the very last days of an alleged ten-year conflict, the Greek poet's intention was to focus specifically on the conflict's final stage – the triumph of the Greek forces and the destruction of Troy. After all, was not Homer a Greek poet singing his tale to a Greek audience, whose ancestors were the sworn enemies of Troy? For such an audience would not the destruction of Troy have been a fitting climax to the poet's story? Yet Homer stops short of the expected climax. Though Achilles has triumphed over his arch-enemy, and Troy's fall is now imminent, the poem does not describe its fall. In fact it ends on a sad and solemn note. After venting his rage for a time on Hector's corpse, Achilles' wrath fades. Aware that he too must soon die, aware that his father, like Hector's father, will be consumed with grief at his death, his wrath gives way to pity for the aged Priam who has come to him to beg for the return of Hector's body. Achilles agrees, and with this gesture the poem draws to a close: 'Thus they went about the burial of Hector, tamer of horses.' Artistically, this is an appropriate ending. We have come full circle. The poem begins with an act of pitilessness: a king, Agamemnon, rejects the plea of an old man, Chryses, for the return of his daughter. It is this which sets in motion the sequence of events that leads ultimately to the final contest between the story's protagonists: Greek Achilles and Trojan Hector. The poem ends

with an act of pity: the victor, Achilles, accedes to the plea of an old man, Priam, for the return of his son, in this case for burial.

Was this really the ending that the poet's audience would have expected, or appreciated? That raises the question of who Homer's audience was. Which also raises the question of who Homer himself was.

THE COMPOSER AND THE COMPOSITION

To deal with the second question first, the most widely held view is that our poet lived in the eighth or early seventh century, on or near Asia Minor's western coast in the region first settled by Ionian Greek colonists in the twelfth and eleventh centuries BC. The island of Chios and the city of Smyrna (modern Izmir) are favoured locations for his birthplace. (They are in fact only two of the seven places proposed by the ancient Greeks themselves.[1]) But scholarly conclusions about this are purely assumption and inference, based on a range of climatological, topographical, linguistic and chronological considerations. The oft-quoted Homeric simile that refers to storm winds blowing in a southerly and easterly direction across the Aegean Sea from Thrace, the poet's apparently first-hand knowledge of western Anatolia's coastal fringe, especially around Miletus and the Troad region in the north-west, and the predominantly Ionic dialect of the epic compositions are held to be significant pointers to Homer's place of origin. Further, what appear to be contemporary allusions within the poems suggest a date of composition no earlier than the second half of the eighth century and no later than the first decades of the seventh.[2]

But none of this tells us anything about the poet himself. There is just one possible piece of personal information about him: he was allegedly blind. This long and widely held belief is based primarily on a reference to the poet's affliction in the well-known *Hymn to Apollo*,[3] a poem once wrongly attributed to Homer himself. However, blindness seems to have been a disability suffered by a number of early Greek poets. Which is cause for some suspicion. There is something strangely appealing about the notion of a blind bard – to the point, perhaps, where the disability came to be regarded as a kind of generic affliction once suffered by practitioners of the bardic arts in general.[4] But there is no reason to believe that it was

a *genuine* occupational hazard of the profession! We should be wary about giving too much weight to the one single scrap of personal information we have about Homer.

Indeed the poet's very existence has been called into question by a number of scholars, who regard the 'blind' Ionian as a process rather than a person. 'It seems fairly clear', comments Professor Vermeule, 'that no one used the name "Homer" to refer to an individual person until, c. 500 B.C., Xenophanes and Heraclitus created him to find fault with him.'[5] In fact our earliest reference to Homer occurs already in the seventh century, when the elegiac poet Callinus wrongly attributed to him authorship of the *Thebaid*, the lost epic on the legendary war against Thebes. But even if we are confident that there really was an eighth-century bard called Homer, are we justified in crediting him with the composition of the *Iliad* in the form in which we know it today? Or was this composition very largely the product of a group of poets or editors who patched together various individual lays and folk tales about the Trojan War to form a single connected narrative? That view was already expressed in the first century AD by the Jewish author Josephus, who claimed that the epics were not written down by Homer but were creations of a later period, put together from Homer's orally transmitted poems.[6] So too many scholars, the so-called 'Analysts', have argued in more recent times, taking their lead from an eighteenth- to nineteenth-century German scholar called Friedrich Wolf.

One of the factors which long influenced this line of thinking was the sheer size of the epic poems: 15,693 lines of verse for the *Iliad* and some 12,000 lines for the *Odyssey*. The belief that the epics originated as oral compositions was, and still is, widely held. But without the aid of writing, was any human being capable of such a monumental achievement of composition, particularly given the strict demands of the Greek epic metre? This was the hexameter, described by Tennyson in 'To Virgil' as 'the stateliest measure ever moulded by the lips of man', in which the poet could choose between only two possibilities, a spondee (two long syllables) and a dactyl (a long followed by two short syllables), for each of its six feet. In fact, Professor Latacz and others believe that the hexameter was a metre used in Greek oral poetry by the fifteenth century at the latest.[7] Researches into oral poetry, like those conducted by Milman