# THE ILIAD: A COMMENTARY

GENERAL EDITOR G.S. KIRK

## Volume I: books 1–4

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REGIUS PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF GREEK
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For Kirsten
and to the memory of Adam Parry

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# PREFACE

This is the first instalment of a six-volume Commentary on the *Iliad*, of which I hope to undertake the second volume also, the rest being committed to four other authors – J. B. Hainsworth, R. Janko, M. W. Edwards and N. J. Richardson – with myself as general editor. Subsequent volumes should appear at close intervals in some four years' time.

The Commentary has always been envisaged as one that develops as it goes along, rather than one in which everything has been decided once and for all. The latter may be simpler for the user, but the present kind has compensating advantages. Different emphases will emerge, in a more or less logical order, through the six volumes, as poem and Commentary unfold. That is why there is a strong emphasis in this opening volume on poetics, especially at the level of rhythm and diction. Another important aspect of composition, at least of the oral kind, is the varied use of standard themes and 'typical scenes' – the equivalent, on a larger scale, of the standard phrases we call 'formulas'. These are less obtrusive in the epic's opening Books than later, and will accordingly be more fully treated from the second volume on. Again, the overall structure and dominant emotional impulse of this enormous poem – its metaphysical aspect, almost – only emerge as the epic approaches its conclusion, and consequently are left undefined, or open, in the present volume. Homer's methods and aims are in any case unusually complex, and I am not sure that single-minded interpretations in terms of tragic essence or human predicament (for instance) are either justified or particularly helpful – although such dimensions undeniably exist. These matters will begin to require special consideration in connexion with the Embassy in book 9, if not before, but will be most fully analysed and discussed in the closing volume.

One of the commentator's overriding duties is to examine the Greek text in detail and make it as clear as he can. The relation of any part of it, however small, to the *Iliad* as a whole and its literary and imaginative background is always relevant; that goes without saying, but it is a basic emphasis of the present Commentary, and not least of its opening volume, that the better understanding of Homeric poetry in its stylistic and expressive aspects, from phrase to phrase, verse to verse and sentence to sentence, is a fundamental need – the precondition of all other and more abstract modes of appreciation.

Substantial although not massive in scale, the Commentary is directed

primarily to those with a reasonable reading knowledge of Homeric Greek. Further discussion of the kinds of help intended is remitted to the editorial introduction which follows; but it may be noted here, too, that in this opening volume there is relatively slight reference to modern secondary literature on the *Iliad*, outside a repertoire of important and standard works; and that heavy bibliographical coverage will not be sought in the Commentary as a whole. From the commentator's viewpoint that is mainly because such references, difficult in any event to render comprehensive or well-balanced for Homer in particular, can so easily distract one from squarely facing the problem under discussion. I have always tried to do that, often with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* themselves as main guide; naturally many problems remain where the available evidence is incomplete. Sometimes a wider use of other critics' work will turn out to have been desirable; some such omissions, at least, especially over formulas, can be corrected in later volumes.

The spelling of Greek names presents the usual problems. Here, *direct transliteration* has been widely adopted, but with the following exceptions: all ancient authors (and their birth-place), regional names like Boeotia or Locris, names of people like Achaeans, Phrygians (although e.g. Lukie and Boiotoi may occur when there is direct reference to the text). Priam, Helen, Apollo and Odysseus, as well as Troy, Athens and Rhodes, are retained (since 'Helene' etc. would be rather affected); but old friends like Achilles, Hector and Ajax are replaced by Akhilleus, Hektor and Aias. Some may find this initially distressing, but I can assure them they will become used to direct transliteration once they have read a few pages. Latinization throughout, as it seemed to me, would have led to almost as many exceptions, producing curious results with many Homeric names of unfamiliar places and characters. More positively, there is no room in a work that aims at keeping close to the Greek text for such wholly un-Greek forms as Ajax and Teucer; and there is little purpose in pretending, by altering his interesting and ancient termination, that Akhilleus has a different kind of name from that of Tudeus or Peleus.

It remains to thank two enlightened institutions and several individuals for their help and support. The British Academy through its Small Grants Fund provided welcome initial aid with equipment and other facilities. The Leverhulme Trust, by electing me to a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship for two years, has generously enabled me to meet other expenses of research and, in particular, to have a part-time research assistant. Dr Janet Fairweather has provided invaluable assistance in this role, and I owe many excellent suggestions to her, not least over geographical questions, especially in Strabo, and the whole field of rhetoric in which she is an expert. Professor A. M. Snodgrass provided encouragement and authoritative advice over

part of the commentary on the Achaean catalogue, and David Ricks improved the 'methods and aims' introduction. My future collaborators kindly read the first proofs, and Dr Neil Hopkinson generously volunteered to read the second. Between them they have removed a heap of errors; those that remain will mostly be of a more insidious kind, and are the author's unaided achievement. The staff of the Cambridge University Press have been as helpful and efficient as ever. Finally I record my affectionate thanks to Trinity College and the Cambridge Faculty of Classics.

G. S. K.

# ABBREVIATIONS

## Books

Allen, *Catalogue* T. W. Allen, *The Homeric Catalogue of Ships* (Oxford 1921)

*ANET* J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament* (3rd edn, Princeton 1969)

*Arch. Hom.* *Archaeologia Homerica: die Denkmäler und die frühgriechische Epos*, edd. F. Matz and H. G. Buchholz (Göttingen 1967– )

Bolling, *External Evidence* G. M. Bolling, *The External Evidence for Interpolation in Homer* (Oxford 1925)

Burkert, *Griechische Religion* W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart 1977)

Chantraine, *Dict.* P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris 1968)

Chantraine, *GH* P. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique* I–II (Paris 1958–63)

Cook, *Troad* J. M. Cook, *The Troad: an Archaeological and Topographical Study* (Oxford 1973)

Denniston, *Particles* J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (2nd edn, Oxford 1951)

Desborough, *Last Mycenaeans* V. R. d'A. Desborough, *The Last Mycenaeans and their Successors* (Oxford 1964)

Erbse H. Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem* I–V (+index vols.) (Berlin 1969– )

Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes* B. C. Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad* (*Hermes* Einzelschriften 21, Wiesbaden 1968)

Frisk H. Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg 1954–73)

Giovannini, *Étude* A. Giovannini, *Étude historique sur les origines des catalogues des vaisseaux* (Berne 1969)

Griffin, *HLD* J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford 1980)

Hainsworth, *Flexibility* J. B. Hainsworth, *The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula* (Oxford 1968)

Hesiod, *Erga* = Hesiod, *Works and Days*

Hoekstra, *Modifications* A. Hoekstra, *Homeric Modifications of Formulaic Prototypes* (Amsterdam 1965)

Hooker, *Iliad III* J. T. Hooker, *Homer Iliad III* (Bristol 1979)

Hope Simpson, *Mycenaean Greece* R. Hope Simpson, *Mycenaean Greece* (Park Ridge 1981)

HSL R. Hope Simpson and J. F. Lazenby, *The Catalogue of Ships in Homer's Iliad* (Oxford 1970)

*HyDem, HyAp, HyHerm, HyAphr* *Homeric Hymns* to Demeter, Apollo, Hermes, Aphrodite

Janko, *HHH* Richard Janko, *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns* (Cambridge 1982)

Kirk, *Songs* G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge 1962)

Leaf W. Leaf, *The Iliad* I–II (2nd edn, London 1900–2)

Leumann, *HW* M. Leumann, *Homerische Wörter* (Basel 1950)

*LfgrE* *Lexicon des frühgriechischen Epos*, edd. B. Snell and H. Erbse (Göttingen 1955– )

Lorimer, *HM* H. L. Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments* (London 1950)

L–P E. Lobel and D. L. Page, *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* (Oxford 1955)

LSJ H. Liddell, R. Scott and H. S. Jones, *A Greek–English Lexicon* (9th edn, Oxford 1940)

Macleod, *Iliad XXIV* C. W. Macleod, *Homer, Iliad Book XXIV* (Cambridge 1982)

Meister, *Kunstsprache* K. Meister, *Die homerische Kunstsprache* (Leipzig 1921)

Moulton, *Similes* Carroll Moulton, *Similes in the Homeric Poems* (Hypomnemata 49, Göttingen 1977)

M–W R. Merkelbach and M. L. West, edd., *Fragmenta Hesiodea* (Oxford 1967)

Nilsson, *GgrR* M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* I (3rd edn, München 1967)

OCT *Oxford Classical Texts: Homeri Opera I–V*: I–II (*Iliad*) edd. D. B. Monro and T. W. Allen (3rd edn, Oxford 1920); III–IV (*Odyssey*) ed. T. W. Allen (2nd edn, Oxford 1917–19); V (*Hymns*, etc.) ed. T. W. Allen (Oxford 1912)

*Odissea* *Omero, Odissea* (general editor, A. Heubeck; Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1981– ): I (libri I–IV) ed. Stephanie West (1981); II (libri V–VIII) ed. J. B. Hainsworth (1982)

Page, *HHI* D. L. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1959)

Parker, *Miasma* Robert Parker, *Miasma*: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion (Oxford 1983)

Parry, *MHV* A. Parry, ed., *The Making of Homeric Verse*. The Collected Papers of Milman Parry (Oxford 1971)

Shipp, *Studies* G. P. Shipp, *Studies in the Language of Homer* (2nd edn, Cambridge 1972)

van der Valk, *Researches* M. H. A. L. H. van der Valk, *Researches on the Text and Scholia of the Iliad* I–II (Leiden 1963–4)

Vernant, *Problèmes de la guerre* J.-P. Vernant, ed., *Problèmes de la guerre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, Mouton, 1968)

Ventris and Chadwick, *Documents* M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (2nd edn, Cambridge 1973)

von Kamptz, *Personennamen* Hans von Kamptz, *Homerische Personennamen* (Göttingen 1982)

Wace and Stubbings, *Companion* A. J. B. Wace and F. H. Stubbings, *A Companion to Homer* (London 1962)

West, *Theogony* M. L. West, *Hesiod, Theogony* (Oxford 1966)

West, *Works and Days* M. L. West, *Hesiod, Works and Days* (Oxford 1978)

Willcock M. M. Willcock, *The Iliad of Homer, Books I–XII* (London 1978)

## Journals

*AJP* *American Journal of Philology*
*BCH* *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*
*BSA* *Annual of the British School of Archaeology at Athens*
*CQ* *Classical Quarterly*
*GGN* *Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft zu Göttingen* (phil.-hist. Klasse)
*JHS* *Journal of Hellenic Studies*
*TAPA* *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*
*YCS* *Yale Classical Studies*

## NOTE

The numbers of occurrences of words and formulas (in the form e.g. '10x *Il.*, 6x *Od.*') are provided for ostensive purposes only, see p. xxiii. The abbreviation '(etc.)' after a Greek word in such a reference indicates that the total given is of all relevant terminations; '(*sic*)' in such circumstances means 'in that position in the verse'. '2/11x', for example, means 'twice out of a total of eleven occurrences in all'.

| is used to mark the beginning, or the end, of a verse; occasionally, too, the central caesura.

On 'Arn/bT' (etc.) references see pp. 41f.

# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: THE METHODS AND AIMS OF THE COMMENTARY

Over eighty years have passed since Walter Leaf's two-volume commentary on the *Iliad* appeared, and a replacement has long been needed. The present volume initiates a series of six which may or may not succeed in filling that need. Naturally one hopes that it will; but at the same time it is fair to emphasize that it is not, in any case, envisaged as 'definitive', any more than Leaf's great individual effort was. For how *could* there be a definitive commentary on a poem of such length, brilliance and complexity, one that is always open to being experienced in fresh ways? That idea of the definitive has occasionally damaged classical scholarship, and it is as well to concede without delay that many of the judgements to be made in these pages will inevitably be personal, inadequate and idiosyncratic. The intention, of course, is to make a commentary which provides most of what is needed by serious readers of this remarkable poem; but it is in the nature of the *Iliad* itself, and of the present still defective state of Homeric studies in general, that much will eventually require to be amended.

Homer, in any case, presents special problems. The critical literature is enormous, and has passed through historical phases some of which are best forgotten. The idea that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are in an important sense oral poetry, and that the formular systems revealed most fully by Milman Parry from 1928 onward result from that, has brought a degree of welcome relief, not only by demonstrating important new dimensions in criticism but also by rendering obsolete its polarization into 'analytical' and 'unitarian'. Most scholars now accept that the Homeric epics are the result of a developing oral epic tradition on the one hand, the unifying and creative work of an exceptional monumental composer on the other. There is still room for disagreement about the way these two forces interact, and much of the commentator's task must be to show in detail, from passage to passage and episode to episode, what is traditional and what invented, altered or adapted by the main composer for his large-scale plan.

Anyone who works on the early Greek epic must be prepared to enter into detailed and difficult questions concerning the history of the late Bronze and early Iron Ages, including social and political developments; into the political geography of the eastern Mediterranean world during those periods; into heroic morality and religion, including the ritual background

of life and death and developing beliefs about the gods; into the niceties of armour and warfare in general, as well as the technicalities of seafaring – at least as they were understood by poets; into the aims and limitations of oral singers, and the probable effects of new writing-systems; into many other technical matters, but above all into the language, metre and style of the poems, on which so much of the rest, as well as the essence of the epic as literature, depends. Ideally, a new and thorough commentary on even a part of the *Iliad* should be written by a team of scholars, including at least a philologist, an archaeologist-historian, and a specialist on the oral epic; and preferably a historian of religion, a specialist in myths and folklore and a metrician as well. But the difficulties are great, and one can easily imagine the colourless and miscellaneous comments that might emerge from such a collaboration – not to speak of the organizational problems of getting it started. Computers are already altering the ways in which such problems might be tackled, but in any event some kind of single personal plan and overview is essential.

The reader will quickly observe that the present volume of commentary is not overloaded with references to modern secondary literature or elaborate comparisons with later developments in Greek. This is partly due to the conviction that the practical limits of a commentary published in English in 1985 preclude a massive scale; and that, given the need for a medium scale, it was better to use most of the available space for the author's own interpretations, based primarily on the Homeric text, rather than for references to the remoter kinds of modern or not-so-modern speculation.

The disadvantages of an overloaded commentary are well known; which is not to say that full commentaries, especially on short works (or on single Books, for example, of a long one), cannot be of great scholarly value. But the serious reader of Homer needs to be provided, above all, with the materials for making up his own mind about problems, and for reaching a more satisfying understanding of the text. He does not require to be bombarded with lists of articles and parallel passages, with strings of references which he may never look up – or rather, when a reference *is* given it should be one he will know to be profitable if he does decide to track it down. Recent commentaries have made good progress in this respect, but some of them still refer to other works without even outlining the kind of help they offer; this is sometimes used as a means of avoiding the type of explanation that should be summarized, at least, in the commentary itself. Another common fault of the overloaded commentary arises out of the laudable desire to provide a complete classical education *en passant* by recording every possible influence either on the work in question or by that work on later literature. This would be commendable were it possible to achieve it, but only too often the result is a commentary which loses sight

of the real problems requiring illumination. The Homeric epics are in any event a special case, since they stand at the beginning of known Greek literature and the influences on them are hard, if not impossible, to gauge; while literature and culture after them were so manifestly affected by the epic background that tracing detailed influence at every point becomes self-defeating.

In the end, any commentary is a personal selection of what should be discussed and what should not; and yet another argument against the idea of the definitive is precisely that it stifles this personal approach, which has its positive side. For there is no complete and objective code to the *Iliad* waiting to be cracked. There are concrete problems, especially at the linguistic level, which can be more or less definitely solved, but otherwise the text presents a mass of ideas which elicit responses from the reader, and about which he needs to compare his own reactions with those of the commentator. Perhaps he will sometimes adjust his feelings as a result – that would be a reasonable consequence, since, after all, the commentator is setting himself up as a professional, and at the very least has had time to study the poem in depth, in most of its ramifications, in a way that even dedicated students cannot easily match. The present writer is conscious that his own views have often been elicited by quite untheoretical difficulties, and that his awareness of the range of possible reactions to Homeric poetry has sometimes prevented him from proposing a single and definite literary interpretation. The reader will often have strong feelings about the poetry and its effect, and the author does not see it as his function to be always trying to shape those feelings, beyond the range of language and hard fact, by urging a single line of interpretation or a particular aesthetic theory.

Moreover the study of Homer presents special problems which make a-historical criticism, of whatever sort, hard to apply. For oral poems are in important respects different from literate ones, or from those invented by a single poet with a self-conscious creative intent. The complicated mode of creation of a passage of the *Iliad* – dependent as it is likely to be both on the traditional development of oral heroic poems through several generations, and on the particular needs and feelings of the monumental composer with the plot of a large-scale, composite *Iliad* in mind – needs to be worked out, so far as that may be possible, in order to assess the text, to 'read' it even, in a manner analogous to that which would apply to a literate poem. To take a very simple instance, the frequent repetitions which are an essential element of oral poetry need 'explaining' in that sense; if they are simply viewed as part of a text without a history (and almost inevitably by unconscious comparison with other but literate texts the reader has experienced), they will appear either as meaningless, or as eccentricities of style which, if they have a meaning, are almost certain to

be wrongly interpreted – that is, in some other way than as necessary devices of oral composition and 'hearing' (for the very concept of 'reading' is obviously misleading, and in a more than pedantic way, for oral poetry).

Another obvious instance of the effects of ignoring the oral background and special mode of composition of the *Iliad* arises out of the interpretation both of character and of customs and practices. Agamemnon emerges from the text as complex and at times highly erratic; but the chances are that some, at least, of the erratic quality stems from the imperfect conjunction of originally distinct elements of the oral tradition. Some kind of critical discussion about whether the testing of the troops' morale in book 2 (on which see pp. 124ff. of the Commentary) arose in this way or for some other reason *is* valid and necessary, in order to attain a response to the text that is not too dogmatic or seriously distorted; and this is to be achieved not so much through the re-creation of the author's intention (although that is not unimportant) as by the identification of possible accidents of transmission which may leave the implications of 'the text' quite different from those obtained, or intended, by Homer. For it is more than likely that the character of Agamemnon in the *Iliad* is an amalgam of attitudes (towards rulers, for instance) and actual descriptions (whether of him or of other great leaders) that existed in earlier poems and were part of the oral singer's storehouse of themes, phrases, verses and passages. Such elements can become imperfectly sorted and assembled in a process of monumental composition, and it is reasonable, indeed necessary, to ask whether something like that is likely to have happened in this particular instance. The incomprehensible reactions to the testing-motif by various of the parties involved in the action of the poem may suggest a positive answer, and that is likely to alter in some degree the quality of one's response to the vulgate text and indeed to the king's character itself.

For similar reasons many matters of concrete detail in the *Iliad* require a kind of examination and explanation which is usually unnecessary in the case of the nineteenth-century novel, for example. The notes provided by English literature scholars to such a work often seem quite simple; that is because we already know so much of the work's background. With an epic poem composed in a wholly unfamiliar manner and in a foreign, indeed a 'dead', language, and concerning a mode and view of life distinct from our own – an artificial one, moreover, in that it is partly compounded of elements, attitudes and motifs derived from different generations of men over a period of some three hundred years if not more – the matter is bound to be very different. In this case there are all sorts of problems concerning the text to which a whole battery of philological, historical, archaeological, theological, mythological and sociological knowledge has to be brought to

bear. It may sound excessive; but, unless he can do this, the commentator will leave many of his readers open to all the confusions and misunderstandings that a simple confrontation with this very complicated and often arcane text inevitably produces.

In the interest of economy, apart from anything else, it has been decided not to print the Greek text of the *Iliad*, thus allowing more space for the Commentary. Most readers will in any case already have their own texts – the 1920 Oxford Classical Text of D. B. Monro and T. W. Allen, for example, is readily available – and it is far more convenient to have the text in front of one in a separate volume, next to the volume of commentary.

Such a decision has important advantages for the commentator himself, chief among them being that it allows him to concentrate on his primary task. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are special cases, since their text, unlike that of many surviving works in Greek, is in generally excellent condition; this is because of the special status of Homer in antiquity and the operations on the stabilization of the text carried out in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. and especially in connexion with the Panathenaia, and in the third and second centuries B.C. in the libraries of Alexandria and, to a minor extent, Pergamon (see Chapter 3). The *Iliad* is particularly fortunate since a full range of scholia is preserved in some of the great medieval manuscripts, expecially in A (Venetus Graecus 822, written in the tenth century A.D. and now in the library of St Mark's at Venice). That MS alone would offer the reader a usable text of the *Iliad*; it has of course been improved by modern scholarship, and the OCT of Monro and Allen, based on a consideration of the whole range of MSS and on the then known papyri, as well as on fundamental work on the scholia by Lehrs and Ludwich in the nineteenth century, has come to be accepted more or less as the modern vulgate. That does not mean that it is perfect; Allen's system of classification of the MSS by 'families' is agreed to be sometimes misleading, many Homeric papyri have become known in the last fifty years, and H. Erbse's edition of the scholia vetera has resolved some outstanding problems. The *apparatus criticus* could be substantially improved and a new editor would wish to alter a number of readings and spellings in the text itself, and probably to remit a dozen or so whole verses from the text to the *apparatus*: nothing very much in the way of *actual* change in a work of nearly 16,000 verses. Most of the alterations would be relatively minor in their effect, and the more substantial ones, especially those of the status of whole verses, will be fully discussed as they occur throughout the present Commentary – based as they are likely to be not on crucial changes in the manuscript evidence (whatever the improvements that could be made in analysing the relations of MSS), or even on new papyri (which only rarely affect actual readings), but rather on a reassessment of the internal evidence of the poems them-

selves and, to a lesser extent, of the attitudes of the ancient critics as recorded in the scholia.

The production of a new edition of the text of the *Iliad* may be desirable by the highest scholarly standards; it would, of course, be an enormous task. It is not one which the present author could conceivably undertake, even if he were qualified in codicological matters (especially) to do so; the writing of a commentary is enough by itself. The only possible alternative to producing a complete new text would be to reproduce the Monro and Allen text with a few verses omitted, with references to the very small number of subsequently-published papyri which make any difference, with fuller reports of the views of the ancient critics, especially Aristarchus and Zenodotus, but with no radical review of the medieval manuscript evidence. That is what P. Von der Mühll has done with the *Odyssey*, and Dr Stephanie West and Dr J. B. Hainsworth have proceeded along similar lines, although more concisely, in their texts of books 1–4 and 5–8 respectively in the admirable new Italian edition of the *Odyssey* (*Omero, Odissea*, I and II). All these are impressive in their different ways, but the resulting *apparatus criticus* is in no case really satisfactory, leaving even more than usual to the subjective judgement of the editor and being at many points somewhat mystifying to the reader. It is the present writer's firm opinion that all important matters pertaining to the Greek text can be adequately discussed in the Commentary, and indeed are better presented there than through a necessarily incomplete and highly selective *apparatus*.

To turn now to the Commentary itself: having established that it is not intended as definitive, that it does not offer complete bibliographical coverage, that it rejects the idea of 'the text' as autonomous, and that it requires the reader to have the OCT Greek text, *vel sim.*, at hand, its author may reasonably be asked *what sort* of commentary it is intended to be. The answer, obvious as it may seem, is that it aims at helping serious readers of the poem by attempting to identify and deal with most of the difficulties, short of those assumed to be met by a general reading knowledge of Homeric Greek, which might stand in the way of a sensitive and informed personal response to the *Iliad*. It is also hoped that the present volume may help other scholars toward a better understanding of the epic style, its formular and rhythmical elements in particular, as well as of many well-known thematic problems on a larger scale; needless to say the two aspects are connected and cannot reasonably be treated in isolation. The catalogues in book 2 obviously present a special challenge to the commentator, and again it is hoped that the relatively full treatment accorded them will clarify certain issues in a confused area of research. Overall, however, succinctness must be the goal (even at the cost of elegance) because of the ultimate restriction on space, itself the result of what publisher, author and readers can from their different viewpoints accept.

Ultimately it is hoped that the whole *Iliad* will be covered in a further five volumes each dealing with four Homeric Books. Each volume is envisaged as being of not much more than 300 printed pages – the present volume has exceeded that, partly because of the need to comment on many common words and phrases occurring for the first time in the poem, partly because of the special demands of the two catalogues. Subsequent volumes will be prepared simultaneously by separate authors, with the present writer taking responsibility for vol. II and for the general shape and consistency of the whole. With four Books and some 40–50 pages of introductory essays to each volume, that will amount to little more than 60 pages of commentary on an Iliadic Book of average length. That is not very much; not so much as might be found on a Greek play or indeed in a special commentary on a single Homeric Book, like C. W. Macleod's welcome *Iliad Book XXIV* (Cambridge 1982). Succinctness is therefore especially important, together with careful selection; many words, phrases and verses on which something useful could be written, given more space, must be passed over in silence. All commentaries must do that to a greater or lesser degree; the trouble is that their authors are liable to pass over genuine difficulties, too, at least on their first occurrence. It is an advantage of the present arrangement that there will sometimes be a chance of repairing the omission in a subsequent volume; and the same is so, to an extent at least, with important items of secondary literature which may have been overlooked.

The author has relied heavily on certain standard works and makes frequent reference to them; for example, on language, to P. Chantraine's brilliant *Grammaire Homérique* and *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (with less frequent citation of Frisk, Leumann, Shipp, the *Lexicon des frühgriechischen Epos* and H. von Kamptz, *Homerische Personennamen*); on archaeological matters, as a last resort, to *Archaeologia Homerica*; on topography (particularly in book 2) to R. Hope Simpson and J. F. Lazenby, *The Catalogue of Ships in Homer's Iliad* (Oxford 1970), a particularly clear presentation of the evidence to that date (and also to D. L. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1959) and J. M. Cook, *The Troad* (Oxford 1973)); and on battle-poetry to B. Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad* (Wiesbaden 1968). Of earlier commentaries, Walter Leaf's outstanding *The Iliad* (2nd edn, 2 vols., London 1900–2), although obsolete in important respects and extremely 'analytical', contains many observations that are still valuable, and some of these are cited with due acknowledgement in the present Commentary. Short commentaries like M. M. Willcock's on *Iliad* books 1–12 can also contain, as his certainly does, useful insights. The multi-author Italian *Odissea* contains valuable material on various matters common to both epics; for topics common to Homer and Hesiod M. L. West's commentaries on the latter are an essential source.

The list could be continued: for example Milman Parry's collected works in A. Parry, ed., *The Making of Homeric Verse* (Oxford 1971), is bound to be among the commentator's 'bibles' on formular matters, as are the concordances of Prendergast–Marzullo and Dunbar–Marzullo. The point is that the Commentary is supported by reference to a limited number of key works to which readers will have relatively easy access. On linguistic matters something further needs to be said; compared with e.g. Leaf's commentary there are far fewer notes on debatable constructions and forms of words, and that is deliberate. One of the key discoveries about Homeric language is embodied in K. Meister's *Die homerische Kunstsprache* (Leipzig 1921), a work whose main conclusion, that the language of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is indeed an artificial affair, combining elements from different dialects and periods and using great freedom over metrical adjustment and the use or neglect of contraction and digamma, has seldom been disputed. It is completely confirmed in Chantraine's *Grammaire*, for example; as L. R. Palmer put it (in *The Greek Language* (London and Boston 1980), 83), '...the Epic language betrays not only its artificial and conventional character but also that it is the product of a long and complex history'. The artificiality is further confirmed by study of the formular systems and their adaptations, from Milman Parry on (for example by J. B. Hainsworth, *The Flexibility of the Homeric Formula* (Oxford 1968)). The epic singer evidently had great freedom in adapting older forms, combining different dialect elements, and so on. The result is that it is usually impossible to assign an individual and unusual construction or form to a particular stage of syntactical or morphological development. The introduction of new forms seems to have increased somewhat in the later stages of the oral epic tradition – especially around the lifetime of Homer – but, even so, certainty is impossible precisely because the normal logic of linguistic development does not necessarily apply. It is for that reason that the long notes on such apparent abnormalities which were a feature of Homeric commentaries down to the 1930s, at least, now seem unnecessary and often misleading. Arguments about such matters can occasionally reach a conclusion in the pages of, say, *Philologus*, but usually even there they tend to be both over-complicated and uncertain in results. The user of an ordinary commentary is scarcely helped by that kind of speculation, whatever its possible value in the long term; and the same is so of some of the more hypothetical discussions of Mycenaean words and forms as revealed in the Linear B tablets.

There is a very distinct emphasis in the present volume on the detailed workings of metre and of style at the level of diction, especially in relation to the 'cumulative' or adding technique of oral heroic singers; to the sound and rhythm of the verse as indicated by its pattern of word-breaks and

rhythmical cola; to the varying degrees of enjambment and ways of creating longer sentences; to the effects of whole-sentence verses, and flowing ones against internally interrupted ones; and to syntactical (or subordinated) and paratactical (or co-ordinate) modes of expression. The emphasis on such points is partly because of their neglect by commentators in general, but more importantly because they reveal how Homeric verse was constructed and how the formular and conventional language of the tradition was deployed by the main composer to form the rich texture of his *Iliad*. Much of the enormous range and variety of this poetry is completely lost if one fails to notice such things, which pass beyond the 'mere' mechanics of versification – or rather move continuously from there into the depths of meaning and style in the broader sense. Sometimes, admittedly, the observation of 'rising threefolders' and the like (that is a term applied here to verses composed of three progressively-lengthening cola, through absence or weakness of a third-foot caesura and the presence of a strong fourth-foot one) might seem irrelevant or intrusive, but the reader is asked to read the verses in question out to himself, aloud as it were, before he dismisses the comment as excessive.

Care is also taken to present necessary information, not at every point but from time to time, about the formular status of phrases and verses – of single words, even, because they can sometimes have an inherited tendency, not solely dictated by their length and metrical value, to a particular position in the verse. The frequency of occurrence, usually in both epics, is suggested in crude numerical terms (as e.g. '10× *Il.*, 7× *Od.*'), where the numbers are merely the simplest way of briefly indicating the initial facts and providing some check on the commentator's use of the concept of formularity. The whole question of the formular, conventional or traditional component in the Homeric language is extremely important for the exact appreciation of any particular passage, and of course of the whole poem. Something of a reaction is detectable at present from the extreme claims and inconclusive statistics that proliferated after the Milman Parry revolution, but it remains true, nevertheless, that the deployment of a partly fixed phraseology is a fundamental aspect of Homer's style and technique – one that shaped his view of life, almost. One can as well ignore Homer's 'use of phrases' as an ordinary poet's 'use of words'.

Another aspect of many individual notes in the Commentary that will strike readers is the close attention paid to the Homeric scholia vetera – that is, to the ancient critical comments recorded in a few medieval manuscripts, most fully in A (p. 39); and particularly to those which, according to the authoritative work of H. Erbse, were derived from Aristonicus and Didymus (in particular) and so record, indirectly for the most part, the views of Aristarchus himself. Further discussion of these matters will be found in

chapter 3; meanwhile some preliminary justification may be needed of what might appear as at times pedantic in a commentary that does not set out to be either definitive or heavily loaded with peripheral learning. There are three main reasons for it: first, the Homeric criticism of the Alexandrian era was in touch, at times, not so much through manuscript evidence as through looser scholarly and popular tradition, with views and problems concerning the epic from as early as the sixth century B.C.; at its best – rarely, it is true – it may reflect ideas that go back close to the time of Homer himself. Secondly, this school of criticism is part of the history of the poems in a way in which 'the higher criticism' of the nineteenth century, for instance, never could be; moreover it reflects much of the attitude not only of the Hellenistic but even of the classical period to these great national epics (as they had become), and therefore offers a taste of epic 'influence', in a particular form, which is worth noting even in a commentary primarily focused on the *Iliad* itself. Even the aberrations of this kind of scholarship have occasionally been noticed; there were plenty of those, and in general the standard of criticism, Aristarchus apart, was depressing; but even such obvious aberrations can be instructive or diverting, and remind us of how sceptical we should often be about the level of judgement in the rest. Thirdly, Aristarchus himself was a superb scholar whose operations on the text succeeded in establishing an ancient vulgate which is also substantially the modern one. His work on punctuation and prosody (preserved in many of the comments ascribable to Nicanor and Herodian) has been largely taken for granted here, but his views on the status of debatable verses and passages, as well as on specific Homeric expressions and episodes, are a necessary part of any survey of the evidence for such important matters.

Two final observations need to be made. The first is that the preliminary chapters in this first volume will be essays on various aspects of the *Iliad* and its composition; since it *is* the first volume, these will deal with essential preliminary topics like Homer's date and background, the problems of orality and literacy, and the rhythm, formulas and other more concrete aspects of his style; as well as adding something more on the scholia and on the first four Books in their general context. Each subsequent volume will contain other critical essays, and the intention is that they should eventually cover the various aspects of the *Iliad* and so provide a complete background to the Commentary. Inevitably some of these essays will have to be delayed beyond the first point at which they might become relevant; for example similes will be treated in a later volume, although it would have been useful to have a general discussion even in this one as background to the detailed comments on the developed similes that occur in books 1–4. Similarly the battle-poetry begins in book 4, but a general discussion of it will be delayed until (probably) volume III, when fighting becomes the

predominant part of the action. The reader is asked to accept this inconvenience, which it is hoped is outweighed by positive advantages.

The second observation is that the author may be thought to be adopting in this volume a somewhat more 'unitarian' approach to the *Iliad* than he has in earlier writing. That reflects, perhaps, a small change in his own position, but primarily it is because, other things being equal and for one who is trying to produce helpful and objective comments, it is better to err on the side of conservatism, of treating the text as a reasonable reflection of Homer's own poem, except where there is a strong case to be made on the other side and for one or other of the various possible kinds of distortion. It remains true, as the author has stressed before, that in a monumental poem created substantially in an oral tradition, and then passed through at least a couple of generations of transmission by decadent and quasi-literate singers and rhapsodes, a degree of looseness, of departure from the *ipsissima verba* of Homer at any single performance, is almost inevitable in any surviving version whatever.

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. The making of the *Iliad*: preliminary considerations

No commentary on the *Iliad* can avoid discussing, in a preliminary way at least, the poem's author and the manner of its creation. That is all the more necessary with what will turn out to be a substantially oral composition, the text of which cannot be treated with the disregard of circumstance which is sometimes applied nowadays, as a reaction against historicism and psychologism, to the assessment of fully literate works. The difficulties of the old 'Homeric Question' in its traditional form are all too familiar and will not be entered into here – the systematic study of the Greek text will, indeed, help to clarify many of the remaining problems more satisfactorily than any isolated general consideration could. On the other hand the objective evidence concerning composition and date deserves summarizing; for an account of the basic facts I have sometimes drawn on my earlier book *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge 1962), especially chapter 13, 'The circumstances of Homeric composition', as well as on 'Objective dating criteria in Homer', *Museum Helveticum* 17 (1960) 189–205, to both of which the reader is referred for supporting references. These matters occupy sections (i) and (ii) below; (iii) sets out some fundamental considerations relating to Homer's possible use of writing, and the chapter closes with a suggestion in (iv) about Greece's unusual and perhaps unique status in respect of oral poetry.

### (i) The external evidence for Homer's date and background

Antiquity knew nothing definite about the life and personality of Homer. Little about him that is at all plausible is found in the ancient traditions whose proliferation we can trace back to the sixth century B.C., except only that he was an Ionian particularly associated with Smurne and Khios. The *horror vacui* that was an endemic disease of ancient biographers caused a mass of spurious details to be invented, many of them palpably based on innocent passages in the poems themselves, others supplied by local interests or designed to reconcile divergent conjectures. The commonest version to be found in the various Lives of Homer, eccentrically created from the Hellenistic period onward but sometimes incorporating stories from the

classical age, is that Homer was born in Smurne (an Aeolic foundation which became Ionic early in its history), lived in Khios and died in the insignificant Cycladic island of Ios; his name was originally Melesigenes, his father being the river Meles (!) and his mother the nymph Kretheis; he was also descended from Orpheus and contemporary with, or even a cousin of, Hésiod, with whom he had a poetical contest in Euboea. Much of this information is recognizably fantastic and nearly all of it is probably worthless; but the tale about Meles and Kretheis was already being discussed, according to Harpocration, as early as the genealogical historian Hellanicus in the fifth century B.C. Even in the relatively critical environment of classical Athens it was possible to say, or deny, almost anything about this almost wholly mysterious figure. Not even the association with Smurne and Khios, the latter backed by the existence there from at least the late sixth century B.C. of a rhapsodic guild called the Homeridai or 'descendants of Homer', can have been watertight – or there would not have been so many rival claimants, of which Kume, Ephesos and Kolophon were the chief but to which several others had been added by the Roman period.

The association of Homer with both Khios and Smurne is said (in the second pseudo-Plutarchan Life) to have been already made by Pindar, whose older contemporary Simonides of Keos (more probably than Semonides of Amorgos, somewhat earlier) ascribed a famous Iliadic verse, 6.146, to 'the man of Khios'. Similarly a 'blind man... from rugged Khios' was claimed (in verse 172) as author of the Delian part of the 'Homeric' *Hymn to Apollo* – that is likely to be a Homerid claim, and implies the connexion of Homer with Khios as early as this Hymn, which R. Janko in *HHH* places in the mid-seventh century B.C. but I hesitantly retain in the early sixth. Pindar also wrote of the Homeridai as 'singers of stitched tales', ῥαπτῶν ἐπέων... ἀοιδοί (*Nem.* 2.1f.); and the scholium on this passage states that they were at first members of Homer's family, but later were rhapsodes who claimed no blood descent; one of them was Kunaithos of Khios, who first recited the poems of Homer to the Syracusans in 504 B.C. The last part of this could be accurate; much of the rest may be speculative, but that there was some sort of guild-organization in Khios as early as the sixth century at least, claiming a special relationship with Homer and his works, need not be doubted. It survived there, apparently in a degenerate form, at least until Plato's time. Unfortunately we do not know the origins of these eponymous or guild organizations, or precisely how loose and fortuitous they may have been. Certainly the Homerid connexion need have been little closer than that which related doctors who called themselves Asklepiadai to the semi-divine Asklepios, or even the Homeric herald Talthubios to the Spartan clan of Talthubiadai. It can however be concluded

that the associations of Homer with Khios were claimed at least as early as the earlier part of the sixth century B.C. and seemed to have some supporting evidence. On the other hand the lack of detailed biography concerning their founder and supposed ancestor suggests that there was no continuous Homerid tradition in Khios; otherwise it would surely have been disseminated at some stage, if only to bolster the group's own disputed claims. The Smurne connexion, by contrast, managed to maintain itself in the tradition even without such an assumed family connexion; perhaps that had something to do with the presence of Aeolic forms in the predominantly Ionic dialect-mixture of the epic.

The absence of serious discussions of Homer's life and person from the surviving literature of the classical era remains surprising. His name happens not to be directly cited before Simonides, Heraclitus and Pindar, but there was obviously much incidental speculation about his date and background. Thus the elegiac poet Callinus in the middle of the seventh century B.C. is said by Pausanias (9.9.5) to have ascribed a Theban epic to him; Theagenes of Rhegion at the end of the sixth wrote an allegorical treatise on his works; and his chronological relation to Hesiod was discussed by the poet Xenophanes at about the same time. This question of date was obviously of great interest, and a whole range of possibilities, from close to the Trojan War itself down to 500 years after it, was advanced at different times. Much the most important contribution to the debate was made by Herodotus, who at 2.53.2 expressed the firm opinion that 'Hesiod and Homer were 400 years older than me and not more'; it was they, he thought, who created a theogony for the Greeks and gave the gods their names and functions. Here he is thinking of the Homeric picture of the Olympian gods, and of the Hesiodic *Theogony* in particular; and since Hesiod deals with the earlier stages of divine development, that is perhaps why Herodotus names him first (and why in other lists of divine authorities from Orpheus downwards Hesiod often precedes Homer). Herodotus' opinion about Homeric religious innovations is pure speculation, but the date he offers so confidently, in its upper limit at least, seems to depend on harder information. It is an attractive modern conjecture (by H. T. Wade-Gery, *The Poet of the Iliad* (Cambridge 1952) 25–9) that the phrase 'and not more' in his '400 years... and not more' implies that he was basing this computation on a chronological factor which he himself regarded as probably excessive, and that concerning the length of a generation. For Herodotus the 40-year generation, which seems to have been quite commonly accepted, was unrealistic; at 2.142.2 he states his own feeling that 'three generations of men are a hundred years'. If so, then his maximum of 400 years (which is likely in any event to be based on some kind of genealogical count) may represent ten 'stretched' generations, and his own

lower estimate would make those same ten generations represent not 400 but about 330 years before his own time. Given that he was writing around 435 B.C., that would put Homer around 760 – not a bad shot! But we should remember that, even if Wade-Gery's idea is correct, the calculation would still depend on the unassessable assumption of a genealogy for Homer (perhaps a Homerid one?) reaching back precisely ten generations – a conveniently round number.

Homer, then, was as much a remote figure to the ancient world as he is to us. Of all the speculations about him of which evidence survives, only Herodotus' calculation of his date and the general agreement that he came from somewhere in Ionia are of much value; the former being supplemented by the date of around 700 B.C. given for the *floruit* of Arctinus of Miletus, composer of the *Aithiopis* which started where the *Iliad* left off, by the annalist Artemon of Clazomenae (Kirk, *Songs* 286). One also wonders whether the idea of him as blind, the τυφλὸς ἀνήρ of the Delian hymn (*HyAp* 172), had any special authority – but then blindness was often associated with singers (no doubt partly for real reasons), and Demodokos, one of the two singers in the *Odyssey* itself, was blind, which arouses some suspicion.

That the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were widely known by the middle of the seventh century B.C., if not earlier, is supported by other considerations: mainly the quotations and echoes in surviving poetry of that time (in Archilochus, Alcman, Callinus and Tyrtaeus especially), but also a couplet referring to Nestor's cup of *Il.* 11.632ff. which was inscribed around 725 B.C. on a cup excavated in Ischia in 1954. This is confirmed by the appearance of heroic scenes as decoration on vases from around 735 B.C. onward. The earliest of these (Herakles and the Stymphalian birds on a late-Geometric jug in Copenhagen; a specific battle-scene, arguably the end of the duel in *Iliad* book 7, on another jug in the Louvre; Kirk, *Songs*, pl. 5, *a* and *b*) are either non-Homeric in subject or are not certainly identifiable in themselves; but by soon after 680 B.C. topics like the blinding of Poluphemos or Odysseus' subsequent escape from his cave tied underneath the ram are inescapably 'epic' in inspiration, and it takes a determined sceptic not to see them as inspired by the increasing popularity of the Homeric poems themselves. Artistic fashion, and an equal or greater interest in subjects described not in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* but in poems of the epic Cycle, have to be taken into account; but overall, and in combination with the quotations and echoes in other poets, there can be no serious doubt that both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were quite well known, not only in Ionia but also on the mainland, by 650 B.C. The increase from around 700 in cults of epic heroes and heroines, like those of Agamemnon at Mukenai and Menelaos and Helen at Sparta, points in the same direction.

### (ii) Internal evidence: language and content

So far we have been dealing with various kinds of external criterion for dating and placing Homer and his poetry. Clearly the poems themselves reveal much about their own environment and mode of composition, if virtually nothing about their main author (or authors, this being a subject about which nothing further will be said here except that the intuition of pseudo-Longinus, that the *Odyssey* belongs to Homer's old age, cannot be disregarded). This internal evidence may be divided into two kinds: first that of the language of the poems, and second that of the theoretically datable or placeable objects, customs and beliefs to which they allude. Both kinds are susceptible to a caution that applies to all traditional literature: that the existence of an archaic feature does not necessarily mark its whole context, let alone the whole poem, as equally archaic, since such things can survive in traditional phrases or passages that were incorporated much later into their existing context. The formular nature of much Homeric poetry (on which see chapter 2 (ii)) increases the likelihood of such survivals, as does the artificial and composite nature of the epic language (on which see p. xxii). On the other hand relative modernisms, which once again only implicate their immediate setting, must be judged in relation to the length of the entire tradition, obviously including its final or monumental stage; and in the case of a work like the *Iliad*, which had to undergo a further period of fluid transmission before it was provisionally fixed in an accepted written text (this probably happened in the second part of the sixth century B.C. and as a result of rhapsodic competitions at the Panathenaia at Athens), there was the possibility of limited alteration and corruption after the lifetime of Homer himself. Finally, as with any ancient text, there were further changes in spelling and other minor matters which even the critical work of Aristarchus and his school could not entirely eradicate.

#### (*a*) *Language*

The language of the poems, as has been remarked, is an artificial amalgam of words, constructions and dialect-forms from different regions and different stages in the development of Greek from the late Bronze Age until around 700 B.C. Yet the predominance of Ionic forms is a strong argument in favour of locating this particular oral tradition in Ionia itself – that is, in the central part of the east Aegean seaboard including the large offshore islands of Khios and Samos; for the dialect spoken there developed in certain ways which were not paralleled in the Attic-Ionic of the mainland, and a mainland origin for the Homeric oral tradition is out of the question for this and other reasons. That the *Iliad* was composed primarily in the

ambience of Ionia is confirmed not only by this consideration but also by the traditions about Homer's birthplace, confused as they are; and by an additional factor which needs handling with equal caution, namely the references in the *Iliad* itself to specifically east Aegean landscapes and seascapes. These are confined to the probable awareness that the peak of Samothrake was visible from the plain of Troy on a clear day, above Imbros (13.12ff.); to the observation of birds in the Asian meadow at the mouth of the Kaüstrios river (2.459ff.), of storms in the Icarian sea (2.144ff.) and of north-westerly gales from Thrace (9.5); and to isolated bits of knowledge about Asia Minor, not only in the Trojan catalogue in book 2 but also e.g. in the idea of Niobe petrified on Mt Sipulos (24.614ff.).

The Homeric language contains many elements which demonstrate the long period of its formation and also its artificial and literary quality (of which the metrical lengthening of vowels more or less on demand, as in εἰλήλουθα, Ἀπόλλωνα, πουλυβότειρα, ἠϋγένειος, ἀπονέεσθαι, is another aspect). Thus Arcado-Cypriot forms like αἶσα, φάσγανον, ἦμαρ, αὐτάρ, ἴδέ, ἠπύω, survived the collapse of the Mycenaean world only in isolated Arcadia and Cyprus and must have been absorbed into the poetical vocabulary either before or not too long after that collapse. These can be found in the *Iliad* beside mainland Aeolisms like infinitives in -μεν, and ποτί (for Ionic and Lesbian πρός), and more broadly diffused Aeolisms like πίσυρες, φῆρες, αὐερύω, ζάθεος, ἴα for μία, κεκλήγοντες etc. as perfect. There are even occasional Atticisms, most of them, like ἀγξηράνῃ or ἐνταῦθα (for Ionic ἀγξηρήνῃ and ἐνθαῦτα), mere spelling-variants introduced in an Athenian stage of the transmission of the text; of apparent Atticisms which cannot be changed without affecting the metre most are nowadays found questionable, like δενδρέῳ (on which see the comment on 3.152), although 23.226 ἐωσφόρος (Ionic ἠωσφόρος, Aeolic αὐωσφόρος) more persuasively demonstrates Attic remodelling at that point. Conspicuous above all are the many Ionic forms which give the dialect-mixture its predominantly Ionian character: forms like ξυνός, ἔσαν or ἀγκυλομήτεω; or τέσσαρες, ἡμεῖς and εἶναι existing side by side with Aeolic πίσυρες, ἄμμες and ἔμμεν or ἔμμεναι. Usually the Aeolism is retained only where it offers a useful metrical variant, and in purely literary inventions we can find an Aeolic ending, like dative plural -εσσι, tacked on to a genuine Ionic stem as in νέ-εσσι or an artificially distended one as in ἐπέ-εσσι.

Two important elements in the Homeric language reflect real changes in pronunciation and can be approximately dated by some complicated arguments that come under the general heading of dialect-geography. First, contraction (the amalgamation of adjacent vowel-sounds) is not only absent from the Mycenaean dialect of the Linear B tablets but is demonstrably later than the foundation of the Ionian settlements in Asia Minor from *c.* 1000 B.C.

onwards, since e.g. εο contracts to ου in Attic-Ionic but remains open, or becomes a sound later written as ευ, in Ionia. Moreover the Ionic change of α to η was still operating by the time the Mādā first impinged upon the Greeks, not before 1000 B.C., since the Ionians called them Μῆδοι, Medes; yet the Ionic contraction of αε was to α (as in Attic-Ionic νίκα) and not η; therefore the contraction itself was subsequent to *c.* 1000 B.C. The second argument concerns the gradual disappearance of the semi-vowel digamma, whose metrical effects were still felt, as often as not, in the language of Homer. This, like contraction, began to affect Ionic pronunciation only after the completion of the α → η change, since the classical Ionic (and Homeric) version of what was originally spelled and pronounced καλϝός was κᾶλός and not κηλός. In many cases the neglect of digamma can be seen to have preceded contraction; for example ἄκων is the contracted form of ἀέκων which was earlier ἀϝέκων.

That is important because it reveals that, notwithstanding the occasional Mycenaean word or even formula (φάσγανον ἀργυρόηλον or ξίφος ἀργυρόηλον being the strongest candidates to be the latter) which survived into the mixed language of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, certain all-pervading dialectal characteristics, which are often organic in the sense that they cannot be removed by simple spelling-changes, can only have accrued after the Ionian migrations (and in Ionia itself, in many cases). Further attempts to date specific passages, or complete Books or epics, more narrowly by comparing the occurrences of neglected or observed digamma, for instance, or of especially significant contractions like -ῶν for -άων or -ου for -οο or -οιο, are more dangerous, although when carefully handled (see now R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns* (Cambridge 1982)) they can produce some interesting indications here and there. Yet the main conclusion from the Homeric language remains unshakeable: that it was developed for the most part during the early Iron Age, down to the time no doubt of Homer himself.

### (*b*) *Content*

The material objects mentioned in the poems, and sometimes the description of customs and beliefs, offer a striking analogy to the mixed nature of the language. The cultural picture as a whole is an artificial one. Actual people never fought in quite the way the *Iliad* suggests, and their customs in relation to giving brides or disposing of the dead, although complicated and no doubt changing somewhat from region to region and epoch to epoch, are unlikely to have had exactly those inconsistencies which appear in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, most of which result from the conflation of different poetical accounts originating at different periods. For just as the language of the *Iliad* appears as the product of many generations of oral poetry, in which archaic

features are preserved here and there, new developments are introduced from time to time from contemporary spoken dialects, and new kinds of artificial pronunciation are at first tolerated and then conventionalized in the interests of metrical flexibility, so the material and social background is gradually compounded into one belonging to an essentially fictitious 'heroic age'. We shall examine the cultural mixture with special attention to the detection of extreme archaisms on the one hand (since they raise the possibility of a stage of the oral tradition contemporary with the Trojan War itself) and of relatively late innovations on the other (since, if they are suspected of being later than about 700 B.C., they raise the possibility of post-Homeric additions).

The unambiguously Mycenaean objects mentioned in the epics are few: the tower-like body-shield chiefly associated with the greater Aias, of a kind made not later than *c.* 1200 B.C.; the 'silver-studded sword', which became increasingly rare toward the end of the Bronze Age and then fell out of use until the late eighth to early seventh century (its developed formular status, quite apart from its possibly Mycenaean wording, precludes the latter period); the boar's-tusk helmet described at *Il.* 10.261ff. – evidently an unusual object even there, but certainly Mycenaean and unparalleled in the Iron Age; Nestor's dove-cup at *Il.* 11.632ff., which has some resemblance to a famous silver cup from the fourth Shaft-grave at Mukenai and reproduces Bronze-Age design and workmanship (like the boar's-tusk helmet it may have been an heirloom); finally the technique of metal inlay, exemplified in the famous Shaft-grave daggers and described with some misunderstanding when Hephaistos makes Akhilleus' new shield in *Iliad* book 18. Other things are probably or possibly Mycenaean but could be later: the metallic corslet and metallic greaves, the work-basket on wheels of *Od.* 4.131f., the knowledge of the wealth of Egyptian Thebes revealed at *Il.* 9.381–4 and *Od.* 4.126f. Other more general conditions are Bronze-Age in origin but would have persisted here and there into the Dark Age: the undeniable element of late-Mycenaean political geography in the Achaean catalogue in *Iliad* book 2, and the use of bronze not only for defensive armour and spear-heads etc. (which continued virtually through antiquity) but also for swords and cutting-tools.

The immediately post-Mycenaean Dark Age, in broad terms from 1100 to 950 B.C., was probably of great importance for the development of the heroic oral tradition and also for the transmission of information and ideas from the preceding Mycenaean age; but it left no very specific trace in the material and cultural amalgam of the epics (even though it may have done so in one or two linguistic phenomena; see Kirk, *Songs*, ch. 7). Subjects which can be assigned to the early Iron Age down to the time of Homer – that is, to the Protogeometric and Geometric phases of Greek art and

manufacture – and to no other period are again quite few. First, the *pair* of throwing-spears as martial equipment seems to have been adopted around 900 and to have gone out of fashion again within a further two hundred years, with the development of hoplite fighting and the reintroduction of the thrusting-spear (references to which in the confused Homeric picture could be of various dates). Secondly, the single Iliadic and five Odyssean mentions of Phoenician ships around the Aegean indicate a state of affairs unlikely to be earlier than *c.* 900 B.C., when the Phoenician trade-routes to Carthage via Cyprus, Crete, Kuthera and Sicily were established, or to have lasted longer than the early eighth century. Thirdly, cremation as the normal way of disposing of the dead at home and in peacetime begins in the early Iron Age and goes out of fashion again by the end of the eighth century; yet most Homeric mentions of cremation refer to war overseas and are not significant – only Antikleia's statement at *Od.* 11.218ff. that burning is the δίκη... βροτῶν is unambiguous. Fourthly, the absence of any reference to writing, with the exception of the mysterious 'baneful signs' of the Bellerophon-tale at *Il.* 6.168 (supplemented by the omission of scribes from the quite complicated household of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*), must reflect conditions in Greece after the obsolescence of Linear B and before the wide dispersion of alphabetic writing; it could, of course, be an intentional archaism by the monumental composer, in whose time the new script was establishing itself.

There are several other practices which probably belong to this period, but could theoretically be later in their introduction into the Homeric corpus. One of the most important is hoplite fighting, something resembling which is presupposed in three passages in the *Iliad*, at 12.105, 13.130ff. and 16.212ff. (with the possible addition of 4.448f. = 8.62f.). Arguments among historians about when massed hoplite tactics were 'introduced' still continue (see for example P. Cartledge and J. Salmon, separately, in *JHS* 97 (1977) 11ff. and 84ff.); generally speaking, about 675 seems to be the preferred date, but the fact is that a developed bronze cuirass and helmet of about 725 B.C. were found at Argos in 1953, and suggest that early experiments in the side-by-side deployment of fully armed warriors – although something short of the developed hoplite line depicted on Protocorinthian jugs around 650 – could have been under way at that time. Then four-horse chariots are implied a few times in Homer (at *Il.* 8.185, 11.699 and *Od.* 13.81); two-horse chariots are the norm, but four-horse ones are depicted in art after about 750. Horseback riding, fishing and the use of trumpets in warfare are supposedly 'late' practices, but they too are rare in the epic because they were unheroic rather than because they were unknown.

It is only, after all, the *certainly* datable items which have much value

as dating criteria; the supposedly post-Homeric ones are nearly all chimerical. Thus Odysseus' brooch as described at *Od.* 19.226ff. is not likely to be seventh-century Etruscan after all; the gorgon's-head decoration on Agamemnon's shield at *Il.* 11.36f. and in three other Homeric passages is not necessarily later than 700, since gorgon-masks were probably much older and several found at Tiruns were made very early in the seventh century; only one lamp is mentioned in Homer, at *Od.* 19.33f., and surprisingly few lamps have been found from *c.* 1100 to *c.* 700 B.C. – but lamps can never have gone out of use and could be mentioned in poetry, if necessary, at any time; finally the seated statue of Athene in her temple at Troy (*Il.* 6.297–304) has been curiously claimed as post-Geometric, but the cult-statue of Athene at Lindos was probably of a seated figure and seems to go back to the mid-eighth century B.C., and doubtless there were others; free-standing temples, of course, were relatively rare to begin with but are known from the late Minoan age onwards. One phenomenon and one only can be securely dated after 700, and that is Nestor's proposal at *Il.* 7.334f. (in an inorganic couplet athetized by Aristarchus) that the Achaean dead should be burned 'so that each man may bring home the bones for the children, whensoever we return to our native land' – a custom apparently initiated by the Athenians in 464 B.C.

The absolutely datable phenomena in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* turn out to be surprisingly few, and suggest precisely what we should conclude from other kinds of evidence: that the subject-matter of the poems was gradually formulated over several centuries, beginning soon after the Trojan War itself and ending with the period some five hundred years later when Homer set about making a monumental *Iliad*, with a monumental *Odyssey* following within a generation or so. Post-Homeric details, later than around 700 B.C., whether of language or of content, are virtually absent. That does not absolutely prove, in a generally conservative tradition, that the composition of the poems could not be somewhat later, say around 650 B.C.; that it was, has been argued by M. L. West in support of the view (certainly false on linguistic grounds, cf. G. P. Edwards, *The Language of Hesiod in its Traditional Context* (Oxford 1971) 190ff.) that Hesiod was earlier than Homer; but few people have been won over so far.

### (iii) The possible contribution of literacy to the monumental *Iliad*

If the artificial language of the *Iliad* was formed over a period lasting from the end of the Bronze Age, or shortly before, until Homer's own lifetime in the eighth century B.C., then it was formed for the most part in a non-literate environment and by *aoidoi*, ἀοιδοί, singers or bards, something like Phemios

and Demodokos in the *Odyssey*. That is confirmed by the highly-developed formular system on which so much of Homer's language and style depend. And yet it is a curious fact that a new kind of writing, based on the development of the alphabet, started to take hold in Greece either shortly before or even during Homer's own lifetime. That naturally raises the question whether Homer himself used the new writing, indeed whether the whole creation of a monumental epic in some sense depended on it. This is an important question, as any must be which concerns the manner in which these great masterpieces were composed; yet, unlike the oral techniques implicit in the *Iliad*, it does not have a very direct bearing on the way we experience the poem itself. Nor, since Homer is in any case such a shadowy figure, and the cultural and social background of Ionia in the eighth century B.C. so largely unknown, does it greatly affect either the biographical issue or the assessment of historical elements in the epic. Our understanding of the early history of alphabetic writing would undoubtedly be greatly improved if the question could be settled one way or the other; so would the generalizations we tend to make about the effects of literacy on oral traditions. But the close study and literary experience of the text would remain largely unchanged, and that is what most directly affects a commentary.

I propose, therefore, to set out quite briefly some of the basic facts and considerations. My own opinion has always been that Homer made little use, if any, of writing, and some reflection of that is probable in this brief presentation of the issues; but that opinion could be proved wrong by new evidence at any time, and it would be imprudent as well as pointless to argue it at length all over again.

(1) Linear B writing, which seems to have been confined to bureaucratic uses in the Mycenaean palaces of the mainland and of Knossos, disappeared with the destruction of the palaces themselves and of the social and economic system they represented. That happened by about 1050 B.C.

(2) There is no sign of any replacement writing system in Greece until the introduction of the new alphabet, of which the first direct evidence is of around 750 B.C.

(3) The artificial language and dialect-mixture of the *Iliad* were under formation during much or all of this period – see the arguments from both language and datable content presented in section (ii) above.

(4) Therefore the oral poetical tradition concerning the Trojan War and its aftermath was continuously developing during this broad period. Whether it goes back to the Mycenaean age itself is disputable, but at least there must have been some tradition, not necessarily poetical, about life and warfare in that epoch.

(5) The 'Dark Age' of the eleventh and early tenth centuries was not

so totally disrupted as to prevent the continuity, in places at least, of such a tradition, and indeed it is likely that the poetical narrative tradition was itself under development by then.

(6) An oral poetical tradition is maintained by professional singers whose usual stock-in-trade is likely to have consisted of narrative songs lasting an hour or so – a short evening at the most. This conclusion is based partly on comparative evidence, most fully from the Serbo-Croatian singers studied by Parry and Lord in the 1930s, partly on the descriptions of Phemios and Demodokos in action in the *Odyssey*, and partly on common-sense considerations of a general sort. It is affected, admittedly, by the kinds of audience and occasion that are envisaged: aristocratic banquets are only one possibility, and heroic singers in modern times have had informal popular audiences, in coffee-houses, at weddings and so on. A singer can be described as a δημιοεργός, 'a worker for the community', at *Od.* 17.383–5.

(7) The monumental *Iliad* is of a totally different order of magnitude from those 'normal' songs, and must have been performed in a special way at which we can only guess. It was still designed for a listening audience, since the spread of literacy cannot possibly have been such, by say 700 B.C., as to allow for a proliferation of copies and readers.

(8) There is no special occasion which could of itself accommodate, let alone promote, such a mammoth enterprise. A religious festival like the Delia or the Panionia might seem like a possible environment. The Delian Hymn tells of Apollo's maidens singing of men and women of ancient times and somehow mimicking their accents (*HyAp* 156–64), and there was a tradition about Homer and Hesiod composing hymns to Apollo in Delos according to the scholium on Pindar, *Nem.* 2.1. Considerably later, in the sixth century B.C., competitions of rhapsodes were organized at the Panathenaia at Athens in which large sections, at least, of the Homeric poems were recited. Yet the Ionians who with their wives and children enjoyed themselves with 'boxing and dancing and singing' at the Delian festival, according to lines 147–50 of the Hymn, can hardly be imagined as sitting or standing through 16,000 verses of the *Iliad*, which would take at the very least 20 hours of continuous singing, and that without taking account of pauses for rest or musical decoration. Assuming three-hour sessions as the longest any audience would be likely to endure, at least six or seven such separate sessions would be required for the *Iliad*, and more probably nine or ten.

(9) Since no special occasion can be imagined which would easily accommodate the performance of the *Iliad*, it must be accepted either that the poem was never intended to be heard as a whole, which is unlikely; or that it was regarded as such a prodigious affair that people would accept discomfort, and a certain amount of interruption, in order to hear it over

a period of two or three or four days. Homer must have had an extraordinary reputation in order to be able to impose his epic on audiences despite its unnatural size; but then an extraordinary reputation for such a man of genius is only to be expected. Other oral traditions suggest that a brilliant singer can become very widely known, and is easily encouraged by an enthusiastic public to extend his scope beyond that of ordinary oral songs and performances.

(10) The problem of performance is only loosely connected with that of whether Homer used writing in some way to help him compose the monumental *Iliad*, unless of course the epic was not performed but read. But that is out of the question, since there can have been no general reading public at this stage of the development of literacy, and at least until the growth of a book-trade in Athens in the fifth century B.C.

(11) That Homer used writing to create, either in person or through a scribe to whom he dictated, the whole *Iliad*, for his own purposes and not for a reading public, seems unlikely for these reasons: (a) the newness of the alphabet; (b) the indications that in Homer's time it was used for simple practical purposes; (c) the evidence suggested by Hesiod, Archilochus and the Milesian Presocratics that its use for literary composition developed gradually; (d) the probably high cost and erratic availability of papyrus, the clumsiness of papyrus rolls (of which an enormous number would be needed to accommodate the whole *Iliad*, especially when written in a probably large majuscule script), and the implausibility of such a massive experiment in book-production in the earliest days of literacy.

(12) Those objections do not apply to the possibility that Homer used writing on a small scale for lists of themes and topics, or even the points to be made, for example, in a long and complicated speech.

(13) There is one single argument, but an important one, in favour of a much more substantial use of writing by the monumental composer, and that is precisely the length, complexity and subtlety of the *Iliad* as a whole, together with the feeling they produce of being beyond the scope of wholly oral techniques. Very long oral or primarily oral poems are known from other cultures (for example *The Wedding of Smailagić Meho* by the Yugoslav singer Avdo Međedović), but they are far simpler, more restricted in theme and vocabulary, more repetitive and generally vastly inferior to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* – which by contrast may seem to develop their central plot and various sub-plots, as well as the complex interplay of characters, all kept in place by accurate foreshadowing and retrospect, in a way no singer however gifted could achieve.

(14) That kind of feeling, which some Homerists experience all the time and all must experience some of the time, is one belonging to habitual literates, which is a reason for regarding it with some suspicion.

(15) Moreover our knowledge of the possible range and powers of exceptionally gifted singers is less than adequate for any firm judgement to be made. Nothing remotely approaching the quality of Homeric poetry is known from any other oral tradition; but it is a reasonable conjecture that not only was the monumental composer himself wholly exceptional, but so also was the local tradition of heroic poetry on which he depended.

(16) The highly-developed formular structure of the *Iliad* is matched by an analogous theme-structure and system of thematic variations (for instance in the battle-poetry) which would make the handling of this material much easier for a skilled singer than would appear on first consideration. Moreover the general circumstances of oral poetry in Greece are fundamentally different in one respect, to be considered in section (iv) below, from those of any other developed oral tradition known.

(17) The evidence, to repeat, is insufficient for a firm conclusion at this stage. Relevant details will be considered from time to time in the Commentary, where, however, it is normally assumed that the *Iliad* was composed by predominantly oral means and not written out in full either by, or at the behest of, the main composer.

## (iv) Greece's backwardness over writing: a factor in the development of the monumental *Iliad*

There is another side to the problem of the introduction of alphabetic writing which has been generally neglected by writers on Homeric topics, yet is highly relevant to the understanding of how the *Iliad* might have developed against its oral background. I have already stated the argument in my chapter on Homer in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol. I, and have deliberately followed that statement very closely, although with certain modifications, in what follows here.

The truth is that ancient Greece acquired a fully practicable writing-system (which the Linear B syllabic script never was) unusually late in its general cultural development, in comparison with the transition from non-literacy to literacy in other observable societies. Both Mesopotamia and Egypt were already quite advanced technically when they developed the art of writing ages before, back in the third millennium B.C.; but some of the Achaean kingdoms, if they lagged behind them in many respects, had already in the second half of the second millennium reached a stage of sophistication in art and administration, at least, comparable with that of their Near Eastern neighbours. Yet they could do no better in the way of writing than imitate the most cumbersome features of the hieroglyphic and cuneiform systems in order to develop a syllabary which could never have coped with anything beyond basic documentary uses, even though the

Mesopotamian and Egyptian models had been applied to historical, religious and purely literary purposes long before.

In many respects this strange Greek backwardness over writing (presumably due in part to Minoan influence) and the insistence on clinging to the worst available system – and then dropping even that without immediate replacement – must have been disadvantageous. In respect of poetry, however, it had some paradoxical merits. For the oral tradition, which would have been killed off by any immediate and serious extension of literacy, continued and expanded in the Greek world of the late Bronze and early Iron Age far beyond the modest requirements of village or even baronial entertainment. The heroic tradition based primarily on the exploits at Thebes and at Troy, established in some form by the end of the Bronze Age itself, not only survived the disturbed period which followed but was evidently carried overseas in some form with the migrations to Aeolis and Ionia from shortly before 1000 B.C., to develop there in an era of social, political and economic consolidation and expansion. How far the range and techniques of oral poetry kept pace with cultural progress in other fields is a matter for speculation; but it seems probable that they did so to a worthwhile degree. The heroic poetry of the eleventh century B.C., probably already expressed in comparatively developed dactylic hexameters, may well have consisted, as in most other oral heroic poetry, of short and primarily whole-verse sentences; and similes and speeches are likely to have been similarly rudimentary. Two or three whole centuries of further development in a modestly expansionist environment, and before any intervention from literacy, may well have brought enormous advances in formular and thematic resources, so as to carry the standards of Homer's more immediate predecessors far beyond those of ordinary oral singers.

Even the creation of the monumental poem, more or less without warning, was now made possible. What had hitherto kept heroic poems short had presumably been not one but two main causes: not only functional limitations but also the conservative effect of tradition itself. The functional desirability of shorter poems still applied, but tradition had been already broken in many important sectors of the cultural environment. Oral poetry always originates, and is most conservatively maintained, in a traditional society; but Greek society in the ninth century probably, and the eighth century certainly, was no longer that. Economic change, foreign contacts, colonizing and exploration, the growth of the polis and the decline of kingship: these and other factors must have seriously disrupted a traditional way of life which had evidently persisted, even in the settlements overseas, for centuries – as is suggested by the preservation of religious institutions, decorative and architectural forms and the heroic tradition itself. Largely, then, through the failure to develop the technique of writing, traditional

poetical methods survived into an age when traditional restraints on the scope and form of oral verse had virtually disappeared.

Thus the monumental epic was made feasible – functional considerations apart – by a prevailing spirit of experiment and expansion (exemplified also in art and architecture, not least in Ionia) that was still, in this particular field of culture, compelled to operate within the limits of orality. In an important sense, therefore, the alphabet and Homer are likely to have been not so much cause and effect as parallel products of the new expansionism. A generation or two later, the impulse had gone. Writing had spread too far by the early years of the seventh century B.C. for the creative oral genius to flourish much longer. One result was the derivative Cyclic poems and the Homeric Hymns, even the earliest and best of which show signs of self-conscious and laboured imitation of the oral style. In short, the eighth century B.C. was exactly the period in which conditions were at their best for the production of a monumental oral epic.