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HOMER, THE POET OF THE DARK AGE

By O. T. P. K. DICKINSON

This paper began as a lecture to an extramural weekend course on the Greek Dark Age, organized in Oxford by the Department of External Studies in December 1983.¹ It was intended to suggest that the world of the Homeric poems, insofar as it had any relationship with reality, was more likely to reflect the conditions of the Dark Age than those of Mycenaean Greece, and it was born of increasing frustration at the dominance of what I will call the 'Mycenaean' interpretation of Homer, particularly at the popular level. The recent BBC series *In Search of the Trojan War* has done nothing to lessen this dominance – indeed, it barely suggested that such an interpretation had been seriously challenged – and the theme of the lecture has therefore lost none of its relevance. In presenting a considerably revised version here, I have not attempted to offer an exhaustively argued and documented discussion, which would require a book, and must refer the reader to more extensive treatments of the topic for fuller details.² Rather, I have decided to leave it as a rather provocative exposition of a case which deserves to be made. I have made some attempt to step outside the framework in which the discussion has often been conducted, which to my mind unduly favours the 'Mycenaean' interpretation, but readily acknowledge that many of my arguments have been presented in similar form by others,³ and that some have been admitted to have force by those who in general support the 'Mycenaean' interpretation. Given the quantity of writing on the topic, it is only too likely that I have neglected some discussions, and I have given references mainly to Homeric sources and to recent archaeological finds of relevance. Finally, I should make it clear that it is not my primary purpose to discuss the historicity of the Trojan War or of the Greek heroic legends generally, though this has often been made to depend on the supposedly Mycenaean content of the Homeric poems, at least in part.

In analysing the way that Homer has often dominated reconstructions of the Mycenaean age, E. Vermeule wrote, 'We say in justification that large parts of the poems incorporate Mycenaean traditions, that the five hundred years separating the fall of Troy VIIA from the Homeric version of its fall have wrought only minor innovations, a few misunderstandings of the past and adaptations to more modern experience. We hope that the core of those great poems has not been terribly changed by successive improvisations of oral poets – surely

poets will guard for us the heritage of the past.’⁴ These somewhat ironical comments usefully summarize widely prevalent attitudes and assumptions that need to be questioned. In particular, those five hundred years ought to stick in the scholarly throat a good deal more than they seem to – after all, they represent an equivalent length of time to that between the battle of Marathon and the death of Augustus – but, as Finley has written, ‘The human mind plays strange tricks with time perspective when the distant past is under consideration; centuries become as years and millennia as decades’.⁵ Precisely because until recently little was known about the Dark Age which constitutes the bulk of the five hundred years, scholars seem to have found it easy to treat the period as an interlude in which very little happened, or changed, before the expansion of the eighth century (all cited dates are B.C.). Thus, features which are undoubtedly ‘old’, such as the form of many of the Greek names, are assumed to be Mycenaean at latest rather than early Dark Age or even ninth century, which would still be a century or more before an acceptable date for the poems’ composition; and in discussing references to items that are old, it is often suggested that because they cannot be eighth century, they must be Mycenaean, as if Homer could not be drawing on some piece of description composed at a stage in between. In fact, there is good reason to suggest that there were very significant developments in the Dark Age and that these gave rise to many of the most characteristic features of Greek civilization.

It has to be pointed out that some assumptions still seem to be widely prevalent among specialists in Aegean prehistory and early history about ‘oral tradition’, which are not substantiated either by studies of oral traditions concerning known historical events or by cases where bodies of traditional material, such as genealogies, are recorded at successive periods and can be checked. It is becoming increasingly clear that it was not the business of those who ‘guard ... the heritage of the past’ to give a factually accurate account of the past or even to preserve inherited traditions unchanged; it was to validate by their account of the past the social and political conditions of the present. If these changed, so too must the ‘tradition’.⁶ To believe that the Greeks were uniquely free from this attitude is to be guilty of the worst kind of romanticism about them, and moreover is to ignore the Classical evidence, which not only shows poets freely altering and developing famous stories, but doing so on occasion with politically inspired motives, as in the transference of Agamemnon and Orestes to Sparta.⁷ The very fact that divergent versions of myths, as of more recent historical traditions, could be cited by Herodotus surely indicates the absence of any disinterested love of truth, for if this operated every

source should preserve the same story! The undoubted fact that immense quantities of information can be memorized and passed on orally is no guarantee that the material is historically true and untampered-with, even if this was claimed for it.

The supposition that has been used to bolster oral tradition in this case, that the formulae used in the construction of epic verse by their very nature preserved elements of a bygone world, also has to be questioned. For it has been emphasized by linguistic specialists that the Greek language changed quite considerably over the period in question; many formulae, then, cannot be of Mycenaean date, for they would not fit the hexameter metre in Mycenaean form. Even the description of a genuine Mycenaean object, the boar's tusk plated helmet, apparently contains linguistically late forms.⁸ One might go further and ask whether, granting the likelihood of Mycenaean epic, its metre was the hexameter; if so, it would have been uniquely complex for a Bronze Age metre and have lasted without further change for a remarkably long time. I see no inherent reason why the remoter predecessors of the Homeric poems should not have been composed in simpler forms of verse or even in formal, repetitive story-tellers' prose interspersed with verses, like the Irish legends, and why the whole system of formulae should not have been developed, along with the hexameter, during the Dark Age, as indeed M. L. West has argued.⁹ That Homeric linguistic forms are often old does not prove that they cannot be later than the Mycenaean period, for we have only the vaguest idea of the chronology of the linguistic changes in Greek, which has often been made to depend on that of supposed events such as the Ionian migration, itself not fixed.

But it would be quite misleading to suggest that the 'Mycenaean' interpretation depends purely on faith in the veracity of oral tradition or the antiquity of the hexameter. Rather, the case has generally been argued by proving to the satisfaction of the scholar concerned, that some features referred to *are* Mycenaean, which can then be used to suggest, if desired, that much or all of the poems' content *could be*. Here the temptation is not always resisted to argue, in the case of a feature that could be either Mycenaean or later, that it must be the former, even if only a few uncharacteristic Mycenaean examples are known. At worst, an item which is unique in the archaeological record, and cannot date much later than 1500, the cup found by Schliemann in Shaft Grave IV, is used to prove that the description of Nestor's cup (*Il.* 11.632-7), itself unique in Homer, is genuinely Mycenaean; since the description is by no means entirely clear, it would be better to suspend judgement entirely. But this is symptomatic of the approach often adopted, to find a Mycenaean parallel by hook or by crook. The

underlying assumption, that over several hundred years the poetic tradition would sternly continue to eschew all reference to the contemporary and deal entirely in descriptions of a world that was becoming increasingly remote, not even making use of creative imagination, has never been supported by argument from analogy and has never been watertight, for it is undeniable that features of a much later age than the Mycenaean have been incorporated.

A good example is provided by the references to iron as a material in common use. Iron items were certainly known in Mycenaean times, but iron only began to be worked in Greece in the eleventh century, and was at first used for a restricted range of objects, those that could most easily be forged. Thus, grave groups of around the middle of the eleventh century contain flat iron daggers, but more complex forms, socketed spearheads and shield bosses, are still bronze. Iron spearheads hardly appear before the tenth century, other objects such as tools later still. But Achilles, in offering a lump of iron as a prize at Patroclus' funeral games, assumes that the competitors will have *continual* need of iron: the winner will not have to send someone to town to get more for five years.¹⁰ Such a reference would be meaningless before 1100, when hardly any items were made of iron, probably even before 1000; but a later audience would appreciate that iron was something of which it was useful to have a good supply.

It is the very casualness of this reference that, to my mind, is significant. When something contemporary is referred to in a piece of elaborate description, such as the Gorgon face on Agamemnon's shield (*Il.* 11.36), which seems best related to seventh-century work, then it is reasonable to suggest that the poet has introduced a contemporary embellishment. But when he is, as it were, off his guard, and makes or has his characters make a reference that is not intended to be particularly noted, then I think we have an indication of the true milieu of the poems. There are many such references, which have convinced me that this is the Dark Age rather than anything else, but I must make two qualifications. The first is that I would concede that the last phase of the Mycenaean period, which followed the collapse of the palace societies around 1200 and extended into the eleventh century, might well have resembled the Dark Age proper and the picture of 'old Greece' so brilliantly reconstructed by Thucydides from the early poetic tradition (1.2–8), in which he stresses the constant insecurity, fear of invasion or raid, lack of trade and of capital. I would still flatly deny that it could be made to apply to the palace period even in its latest phase, the time to which the mounting of a great expedition is usually considered appropriate.¹¹

My second qualification is that I would not wish to suggest that the

poems present a wholly realistic picture of the Dark Age or of any phase within it. No epic is a realistic presentation of a society or age; rather, it is a fantasy, but a fantasy in which, because neither composer nor audience can imagine or sympathize with a wholly alien world, reality keeps breaking through. Its interests are specialized, more concerned with war than with trade (though there are in fact several references in Homer). Its characters move part of the time in a world of dreamlike magnificence, encountering gods and other supernatural beings, but at other times their behaviour and preoccupations will be familiar to the audience and may be slightly incongruous in their magnificent setting.

Often enough this magnificence is, in my view, quite simply that of fairy tale. The constant description of vessels and jewellery as of precious metals, especially gold, need not be a genuine reminiscence of the Mycenaean world, which by the palace period seems to have been notably sparing of precious metal though still lavish with bronze; it is conventional in epic and heroic tales of all sorts.¹² I would suggest that the elaborately described shield of Achilles, cuirass of Agamemnon, and palace of Alcinoos, and the much more hazily suggested wealth of Menelaos' hall have little more relationship with reality than the robots that serve Hephaistos or the self-propelled wheeled tables that he makes for the gods, and that if they had a model it is more likely to have been the wealth of Egypt and the Near East as apprehended from imports and tales of the later Dark Age, than any clear memory of the Mycenaean past.

In point of fact, a degree of magnificence was possible even in the depths of the Dark Age, the tenth century, as is evident from the finds at Lefkandi, especially the burials in the 'Heroön'.¹³ Moreover, the discovery of the 'Heroön' underlines an important general point, that to compare the Mycenaean period and the Dark Age is to compare periods well and poorly documented in the archaeological record; hence, unexpected Dark Age finds can change the terms of the discussion, and a Dark Age date cannot be denied to a reference simply because it suggests wealth or elaboration. In particular, I believe that the 'Heroön' removes any need to relate Homeric burial practice to the Mycenaean period, since it provides convincing parallels for many features of the burial rite, most elaborately described for the burials of Patroclus and Hector, which includes cremation, the storage of the ashes in a precious container, and the sacrifice of animals, perhaps humans also; the mound also referred to in these and other contexts is a later feature at the 'Heroön', involving the filling-in of a building.

Cremation, the heaping of a mound over the pyre or the grave constructed to hold the ashes-container, and the placing of a marker

on the mound are referred to separately or together many times in Homer, sometimes in contexts that suggest that this is the normal burial rite, not that of heroes alone.¹⁴ This is remarkable, since even in the Dark Age cremation was the rite of a minority of the Greek communities, while in the final Mycenaean period it was limited to a few individuals, whose ashes, generally in some form of pot, were placed alongside their inhumed relatives in tombs of the traditional rock-cut or stone-built types that do not seem to be hinted at in Homer. Only the most intricate special pleading has ever been able to suggest a relationship between Homeric burial customs and Mycenaean; the problem is that they do not even seem 'normal' for the Dark Age, although there are examples of ninth- and eighth-century cremations under mounds, and some have been found in Asia Minor where the poems are generally thought to have been composed. The example of the Lefkandi 'Heroön' might encourage the supposition that elaborate cremations were thought particularly appropriate for important persons in parts of the Greek world as early as the tenth century.

This, then, is one important area of human behaviour frequently described or referred to in the poems which is consistently un-Mycenaean, and whose only real parallels date after 1000. That some features of the burial ritual have Mycenaean parallels, such as the wailing, which is shown in precisely similar fashion on the late Mycenaean Tanagra larnakes and on eighth-century Athenian vases,¹⁵ is not surprising; it would be far more strange if there were no such parallels, for the Mycenaean population was directly ancestral to the later Greeks, and the Dark Age did not involve a total social breakdown requiring an entirely new start. As has frequently been pointed out, in the wider field of religion, the names of several of the Greek gods are to be found in the Linear B tablets; it would, again, be remarkable if this were not so. But it is not so frequently stressed that several of the most important Olympian gods, such as Apollo, Aphrodite, and Demeter, are absent, that the case for identifying others is questionable, and that there are many figures in the tablets of whom there is no trace later.¹⁶ The gap between the evidence of the tablets and of Mycenaean archaeology and the picture in the Homeric poems, already very close to Classical Greek religion, is very wide and not easily argued away, even if the very occasional reference to temples and to Delphi, once quite plainly as an oracle,¹⁷ are discounted as definitely late features. I would suggest that Greek religion underwent fundamental changes in the Dark Age: practice, the forms of worship, may have remained very much the same, but the recipients of worship very probably changed their names, natures, and positions in the divine hierarchy.

This is an even more significant area than burial customs, but one

in which the facts are more open to dispute. In other cases the evidence is less controversial, such as dress. Men's dress seems to change little between the Mycenaean period and Dark Age: tunics short or long were normal wear, with cloaks over the top in many cases. Odysseus once describes himself as wearing a cloak pinned with an exceedingly ornate brooch,¹⁸ a practice for which there is no clear Mycenaean parallel, but again this might be discounted as a piece of late elaboration. Women's dress, however, is consistently presented as being fastened by a pair or more of pin-like fasteners – Penelope is offered a robe fixed with a dozen such items.¹⁹ These seem certain to be the fibulae of the Dark Age, though references to a pair at the shoulder might indicate the long pins found often in graves, generally in positions suggesting that they were used to pin a shroud. Fibulae first begin to appear before 1200, but only very occasionally and often singly; they are slightly more common in the twelfth century, when long pins also begin to appear sporadically, but both are only regularly found from the eleventh century onwards and begin to become elaborate, sometimes of gold, in the tenth and ninth centuries. Surely what is described as a regular feature should be taken as a reference belonging to a period when it was a regular feature, not one in which it was a rare novelty. In addition, earrings with triple pendants are twice mentioned; it seems impossible not to relate this to ninth-century earrings found at Lefkandi, and in any case the wearing of earrings was not, after the earliest phase, Mycenaean practice.²⁰

Next we may consider the bronze tripods which figure so frequently as symbols of wealth, named as prizes and gifts, even listed first among the presents which Agamemnon offers to Achilles as reparation for his wounded honour. Examples of bronze tripods do occur before 1200, but they are plain unspectacular items, found alongside a wealth of other metal vessel types. It is in the Dark Age that they are likely to have been highly valued items symbolizing great wealth: two types are known, one consisting of a three-legged stand on which a separate cauldron is placed, the other of a cauldron to which handles and legs are attached. The first was originally produced in Cyprus, but was certainly being produced at Lefkandi by 900; the other, closer to the Mycenaean type, may have survived occasionally (clay imitations are known from an Athens grave of the eleventh century) and was certainly being made again by the eighth century, during which it was developed to extremely large and elaborate non-functional forms. Both types were dedicated at sanctuaries during the ninth and eighth centuries, which seem the most appropriate time for references to them as highly valued items.²¹

The field of warfare bulks large in the poems, especially the *Iliad*,

and here the position is more complex. On occasion old-fashioned gear is referred to, and the concentration on the activities of heroes makes for an unreal picture of battle in any period, but much of what is described could fit a Dark Age context as well as, if not better than, a Mycenaean one. Armour is frequently described as of bronze, presumably bronze-plated, and such armour is certainly known, if rarely, from Mycenaean times, appearing even in very late contexts; by the last quarter of the eighth century it is appearing again in graves, in such well-developed forms that it is likely to have had some earlier history. But it can never have been as common as the epic makes it, and a degree of unreality in such references seems probable. Since in the ancient world bronze was the only normal form of extra protection, any attempt to provide heroes with special armour would be almost bound to involve it, unless reality is abandoned altogether, as with the references to golden armour and other extravagances. The material of weapons is also normally bronze, where it is referred to at all, and this is undoubtedly 'old', but as I have pointed out the introduction of iron was a slow process, and bronze weapons survived past it – a bronze spearhead was buried with a great Eretrian noble in the last quarter of the eighth century – so that the memory that weapons had once been of bronze alone would surely survive; such references need not, themselves, derive from the period when this was the case.

What is done with the weapons will often suit a very late Mycenaean or Dark Age context better than the world of the palaces. Spears, often carried in pairs, may be thrust with or thrown. The size of a standard Mycenaean spear seems to preclude its being thrown effectively, but small javelin-like spearheads have been found in twelfth- and eleventh-century graves, and there is at least one twelfth-century representation of a warrior carrying two spears;²² when representations of warriors become common again, in the eighth century, this is normal. A reference to this practice might, then, be appropriate to any time between the latest Mycenaean period and the Dark Age, but hardly earlier.

Swords are used to cut and thrust with, including the notorious *ξίφος ἀργυρόηλον* which has been thought not only to be a genuine Mycenaean reference but to indicate the existence of *early* Mycenaean hexameter epic, since rivet-heads capped with precious metal (more often gold than silver) are commonly found on early Mycenaean weapons. But such weapons are not suitable for a cutting stroke, and it must moreover be assumed that the reference is to the rivet-cappings and not the rivets themselves; that silver rivets would not be functional would not bother a poet who speaks of golden armour and tin greaves! Since silver cappings are found on the rivets of iron swords in Cyprus,

if so far only of eighth- and seventh-century date,²³ the technique clearly survived through the Dark Age or was reinvented in it, which suggests a need for caution in giving a date to this formulaic phrase.

The other equally notorious item that has been adduced as a genuine Mycenaean reference is the helmet plated with boar's tusk described in *Il.* 10.261–5; the book is, incidentally, widely believed to be an addition to the original poem! Here it seems indubitable that a Bronze Age object is being referred to, but the item is described as special and it does not seem impossible that the description was inspired by some relic from the past like the occasional bronze weapon. The characteristic plates have been found in contexts as late as the end of the Bronze Age, and representations, which are still quite common in late Mycenaean art, could also survive: a plaque showing a warrior with such a helmet and a body-covering shield was buried at Delos in a foundation deposit that cannot have been laid down until the late eighth century.²⁴ Thus a Dark Age poet could have seen and been inspired by such an item.

References to body-covering shields, particularly Ajax's shield 'like a tower', have also been thought specifically early Mycenaean, but as just noted representations are known in late Mycenaean art, though the twelfth-century warrior scenes show them carrying short shields. Given that no shields have survived *in corpore* from any relevant period, I do not see that it can be proved that body-covering shields were not used in the Dark Age. Some representations of the type known as the 'Dipylon' shield do suggest a long shield, though in general it and other types look short; it has been argued that the 'Dipylon' shield itself is a confused memory of the Mycenaean 'figure of eight' shield and is included in eighth-century scenes to indicate that a heroic reference is intended, but this is a contentious point, and it seems just as likely that a genuine Dark Age shield type is being represented.²⁵

Ajax's shield, with its bronze facing on top of eight layers of oxhide, is in any case a practical impossibility because of the weight, and the facing is without Mycenaean parallel; thus, if a genuine Mycenaean reminiscence is involved it is, like the *ξίφος ἀργυρόηλον*, out of context. The common description of shields as 'bossed' is a point of some interest, for it surely refers to the prominent bronze bosses found in graves of the twelfth and eleventh centuries and again in the eighth century; such a reference, then, is at best very late Mycenaean and will not suit the body-covering type of shield. The extremely elaborate metal facing of Achilles' shield seems likely to have been inspired by Oriental-style bronze shield facings of the kind found in eighth- and seventh-century contexts in Crete;²⁶ there is no suggestion that Mycenaean shields were decorated in any comparable way.

Finally, the warriors frequently ride to war in chariots and dismount to fight. After years of debate it has been shown, to my mind conclusively, that this is the only way that the chariot was used in the Bronze Age Aegean or Near East, other than as a shooting platform; notions of cavalry-like charges are out of the question, though there is evidence for them later.²⁷ Descriptions may have been influenced by the early use of the horse to carry hoplites to battle, but this is not forced and there seems no reason why genuine reminiscences of chariot use should not be involved. For as has been pointed out, the eighth-century representations of chariots are so close to twelfth-century representations that it seems easiest to suppose that the chariot survived through the Dark Age, if likely to be obsolescent by the eighth century.²⁸ The poet, then, is in all probability describing the practice of the past, but not necessarily the remote, Mycenaean past.

A field in which it is much harder to feel confidence in a non-Mycenaean interpretation is the palace, so constantly the scene of the action in the *Odyssey* that it is possible to build up a detailed if still not totally clear reconstruction. While an element of epic or 'fairy tale' elaboration may be detected in the continual references to finely smoothed stone and total omission of the basic Mycenaean and Dark Age building material, mud brick, and while Priam's palace with its sixty-two bedrooms for his sons and sons-in-law may be inspired by tales of the great palaces of Egypt and the Near East,²⁹ it is undeniable that what is described in the *Odyssey* is more complex than any Dark Age building so far discovered, but seems to have many features in common with Mycenaean palaces. Increasingly complex buildings of the ninth and eighth century are being discovered, which can provide parallels for such un-Mycenaean features as a side-entrance to the 'megaron', but none have so far produced evidence of a second storey and none have any distinction as architecture.³⁰ But there are many features of the account that cannot easily be squared with what is known of Mycenaean palaces and should not be discounted. There is no reference to the characteristic Mycenaean use of fine plaster, often decorated with painted scenes or patterns, on the floors and walls, even in the courtyard; rather, the 'megaron's' floor seems to be plain earth, and it and the yard (which in Odysseus' palace contains a dung heap) are used for the butchering, cooking, and eating of animals in a way that is scarcely possible to envisage in the central room of a Mycenaean 'megaron'-suite. Nor is there any mention of the great ceremonial hearth that dominates this room in the main Mycenaean palaces and would, with its flanking columns, make the use of the room by more than a few people extremely uncomfortable! The palace and yard are enclosed by a fence or wall with lockable outer door, and despite the

supposed splendour guests seem to sleep in a makeshift manner in the anteroom to the 'megaron' or perhaps a sheltered area around the edge of the yard. One gets the impression that a veneer of elaboration, which might include Mycenaean reminiscences, is being imposed on a fairly simple kind of big farmhouse. More general references to dwellings are indistinct, and the clearest account of a town, that of the Phaeacians, with its city wall and market place containing a god's temple or shrine, is generally reckoned to be more like a Greek town than anything Bronze Age.³¹

Thus, in my view, many features of the setting, including some of the most fundamental, contain at best the occasional, not always very convincing, Mycenaean reference, and a strong Dark Age element. But even those sceptical about all else have generally been prepared to see genuine Bronze Age tradition in features of the geography, the places and peoples mentioned. It must be commented that overall the picture of the non-Greek world is unreal in a way characteristic of epic and folktale, presenting all peoples as mutually intelligible and as living in much the same way. Yet it is undeniable that any reference to Troy as a great centre can only be Bronze Age, since the site always believed in antiquity to be that of Homer's Troy was an insignificant Greek settlement in the eighth century, though the Bronze Age remains suggest at best an important fortress, not the great walled city of Homer. But most of the allies of the Trojans will be sought for in vain in those Hittite records that appear to deal with western Anatolia; they seem rather to be the neighbours of the later Greeks of Asia Minor and the north Aegean, though under 'old-fashioned' names in some cases. Similarly, the Phoenicians or Sidonians who figure as great traders, the source of many exotic items, are surely a feature of the Dark Age, when many elaborate and precious items of Near Eastern craftsmanship did indeed find their way to Greece;³² such items are rare in the Mycenaean world, which could produce its own fine work. So the picture of the non-Greek world is, at the least, heavily tinged with features of the recent past and present.

But the famous Catalogue of Ships in *Iliad* 2 as analysed by a series of scholars, most recently R. Hope Simpson and J. F. Lazenby,³³ has convinced many that it contains a great deal of genuine information about Mycenaean Greece, to the extent that it is sometimes argued, 'If this is largely Mycenaean, why should not a good deal more be?' But it does not convince me. It would be possible to write a whole paper on this topic alone, but I will try to confine myself to the most significant points. First, if it is to be considered a list of Mycenaean sites, some explanation for the choice of these particular sites is needed. It has long been clear that it cannot be a list of all inhabited sites of

the period, since far more are now known in every region, but neither can it be a list of the more significant sites in each region, as one might perhaps expect. For many sites that have been identified, often rather shakily, as Catalogue sites seem from the scanty remains to have been totally insignificant in Mycenaean times, including sites that figure largely in the poems, like Sparta, which is consistently presented as Menelaos' capital.³⁴ In fact, there are sites whose presence is inexplicable by such means; there are sites which, though evidently important in Mycenaean times, seem not to be represented; and there are sites like Styra and Carystus in Euboea which have obstinately refused to produce Mycenaean remains – a point of some interest, since the sites listed for Euboea are precisely those which were significant centres in Greek times, and no others, a situations paralleled in Rhodes, where the Mycenaean evidence suggests that more sites should be listed, if anything.³⁵

The whole process by which the Catalogue sites are identified by Hope Simpson and Lazenby is not beyond criticism. As Chadwick has pointed out, it involves the assembling of all indications as to where a named site was, or was thought to be, and looking for a Mycenaean site on or near that place; but since Mycenaean sites are so numerous there is bound to be one on or near most Classical sites, so that the coincidence is not surprising; it would only be significant if Mycenaean sites were rare.³⁶ Moreover, the argument is in constant danger of being circular, for the presence of Mycenaean material, especially in quantity, has often been treated as an argument in favour of the identification, which can prove embarrassing when research reveals the existence of several possible candidates, as in the case of Dorion.³⁷ It hardly needs pointing out that if a site has been deserted since the prehistoric period, we have no means of knowing what its name was, and the presence of Mycenaean material is not, on its own, an argument, since it assumes what is required to be proved, that the Catalogue is a list of Mycenaean names. West has also commented, 'But a Mycenaean site can only be tied to a Homeric name with any certainty where the name survived locally, whether or not there was continued occupation; in which case it was available to a poet of any period'.³⁸ One might add that local pride might well lead to the attachment of a Homeric name to some ancient site, whether or not this was its real name.

But it is not my purpose to deny that the Catalogue contains any information that could derive from the Mycenaean period, rather to argue that it is so thoroughly mixed, like the artefactual references, that it cannot yield a consistent picture of any age or indicate a single major source. When Hope Simpson and Lazenby suggest that more than one Mycenaean phase is being referred to,³⁹ then the whole case

for trying to refer the Catalogue to a single period at all seems to fall to the ground. Such a repetitive, formulaic composition could be expanded at will, and we know from the famous account in Herodotus of the dispute over Salamis between Athens and Megara that there were variant versions in the sixth century. Even leaving aside various minor irritants, like the prominence of the Boeotians, whom tradition, as reported by Thucydides, brought to Boeotia *after* the Trojan War,⁴⁰ and others already mentioned, the description of the two states in the Peloponnese that were certainly important in Mycenaean times seems totally at odds with the likely Mycenaean reality.

Analysis of the Linear B tablets of Pylos has demonstrated which are the local administrative centres of the state ruled from Pylos and provided many other place names. Apart from Pylos itself, only one other administrative centre and one, perhaps two, other place names in the tablets are repeated in the nine sites named in the Catalogue, and such indications as there are seem to place the whole centre of gravity of the Pylian state, as envisaged by Homer, much further north, while in the *Odyssey* Pylos is quite clearly envisaged as on or very near the coast, like Classical Pylos and unlike the Mycenaean site.⁴¹ In no way can the two accounts be squared, not even by the desperate expedient of assuming that this is a post-palatial Mycenaean Pylos, since archaeologically such indications as there are suggest some survival in the neighbourhood of the palace, but nothing very much further north until the Olympia region. Whatever the Catalogue represents, it hardly seems to be any kind of Mycenaean Pylos.

In the north Peloponnese the picture is even more clear, because we are better informed. In the Catalogue this is divided between the kingdoms of Agamemnon, based at Mycenae, and Diomedes, based at Argos. The places named are almost entirely those which were centres of petty states at one time if not throughout the Greek historical period, few of which seem to have had much significance in Mycenaean times except as local centres of population. There seems no reason why they should be named in preference to such Mycenaean centres as Dendra, the third great fortress of the Argolid after Mycenae and Tiryns, whose ancient name was probably Midea, or Nauplia and Prosymna, both of which have notably large chamber tomb cemeteries, nor why Argos, arguably less important than any of these, should be elevated to near-equality with Mycenae. This could never correspond to reality: the Argive plain can support several little centres or one big one, but not *two* big independent states, and in any case Mycenae could never have been important without control of the Argive plain and access to the sea through it. It cannot even reflect twelfth-century conditions, when Tiryns seems the great centre of the Argolid,

while Mycenae still seems substantial and Argos is not particularly prominent.

The prominence of Argos is in fact characteristic of Greek tradition as a whole, which makes Argos older than Mycenae and bases more legends upon it: the great expedition of the Seven Against Thebes was mounted from Argos, and in the *Iliad* Agamemnon is made to give a very lame explanation of why Mycenae was not involved in the expedition.⁴² This is surely an attempt to reconcile two different cycles of legend, respectively treating Mycenae and Argos as the great centre of the Argolid, and one might suspect that the legendary prominence of Argos reflects the historical fact that from at least the tenth century it was the great centre, and may involve the attraction to Argos of legends originally associated with other centres – thus, Adrastus, leader of the Seven Against Thebes, has a strong association with Sicyon.⁴³ Thus, in the Catalogue Argos is given all the Argolid except Mycenae, since the tradition of Mycenae's importance could not be wholly ignored; to compensate, Mycenae is given a stretch of territory to the north and north-west, containing a string of sites of no particular Mycenaean significance and in some cases, as in that of 'rich' Corinth, surely reflecting a much later period. Corinth is not noticeably richer than half a hundred other sites in Mycenaean times, but was one of the great Greek centres in the eighth century if not earlier.

I suspect that there are many more cases where such 'political' considerations have affected the entries (e.g. the citing of Athens alone for Attica), if they have not given birth to them entirely. In some places an ancient tradition may be preserved: the only time that the Ionian islands, the territory attributed to Odysseus, were of much importance was in the twelfth and eleventh centuries, a time when there were also flourishing centres in Aetolia, the province of Calydon, which is famous in legend but not impressive as a Mycenaean site. But it is probably wasted effort trying to guess the sources of the Catalogue entries.

When in so many different areas the Mycenaean element in the poems seems at best exiguous and is often wholly disputable, and the Dark Age element can be suggested to be large, it seems much easier to me to swallow hard and accept that the Homeric poems relate most frequently to the Dark Age. Their whole milieu seems better suited to this, a milieu in which raiding and petty warfare are commonplace, horizons are limited and news hard to get, government is personal and its foundations somewhat uncertain, depending upon the qualities of its wielders. There is nothing here of the organized and, for some time at least, stable societies dominated by the Mycenaean palaces. Indeed, it is not clear to me that Homer understands kingship at all; much of the time, his references suit better an aristocratic society, in which the

heads of noble houses wield power in federation.⁴⁴ The anarchy that prevails in Ithaca in Odysseus' absence is an impossibility in a proper monarchy, which would have a regent or other officials to stand in for the king; but the whole concept of officers of government, common enough in the Linear B texts, seems alien to Homer. (Here, though, it may be a mistake to try to wring social and political data from a picture developed for artistic reasons; it is artistically necessary that Telemachos should appear helpless, without even the support of relatives, which in any period of Greek history he might expect.) Further, Agamemnon is not the legal overlord of the Achaeans, merely the army commander by consent, and Achilles can only be urged to show him respect because his power is greater and he is senior. Such a picture might suit monarchy in decline, when the collapse of stability has removed some of its traditional props; the notion that a king can expect obedience as of right seems to be wholly absent.

Once the unreal trappings of heroic splendour are stripped away, the world of the poems is small-scale. Wealth is measured largely in livestock rather than estates, a feature which may well reflect a Dark Age preoccupation. Rulers and their families can and do manage most things for themselves, although slaves are mentioned, Nausicaa is in charge of the linen cupboard in her father's palace, Nestor's daughter gives Telemachos a bath, and Menelaos' guests drive sheep for his feast to the palace themselves, while their wives send in bread!⁴⁵ This is a picture of a society dominated by rustic aristocrats, who are just farmers on a larger scale; on Achilles' shield, a 'king' watches the harvesting of his estate, while Odysseus can handle a plough and seriously challenge, while in disguise, an Ithakan noble to a ploughing match. Such things cannot have seemed totally incongruous to Homer's audience, and they are hardly the effect of the poetic tradition, which tends to glorify and is hardly interested in such mundane matters as ploughing. Even aristocrats are essentially poor; Menelaos' fabulous wealth is accumulated through receiving, in his travels, the customary gifts to men of standing, and Odysseus presents himself as doing the same thing.⁴⁶ As Finley's analysis has shown, gift-giving is a basic feature of Homeric society, and it is not the sort of feature that one would expect to be basic to the world of the Mycenaean palaces, which was also basically agricultural and rather small scale, but far more organized. Its rulers could use their resources, partly derived from systematic taxation, to finance relatively vast building projects and to support hundreds of dependents of various sorts; they had no need to indulge in cattle raids, and if they went to war it would hardly be over stolen livestock or, for that matter, women.

Homer, then, is clothing in a garb of his own day or of the recent

past, which might still have seemed quite remote to his audience, traditional material whose actual age is unguessable, but which had almost certainly undergone repeated changes by his time. If the Trojan War was a historical event, it is conceived in Dark Age or purely imaginary terms. Because so often his characters and their world are realized with great vividness – more, I would say, than in any other epic – the incongruities caused by the juxtaposition of heroic splendour and down-to-earth reality cease to be noticed, and petty details of artefacts represented and discrepancies in the account of them will scarcely concern the audience. Those who take the poems as a realistic and comprehensive description of a society and an age, whether Thucydides or modern scholars, are in my view bound to be wrong; but to accept that Homer has most relevance to the Dark Age is, I submit, the only reasonable conclusion to draw from the evidence.

NOTES

1. I would like to dedicate this paper to the memory of Dorothea Gray, my first teacher in Homeric and Mycenaean archaeology. I am grateful to Mr Trevor Rowley, Director of the Department of External Studies at Oxford, for the invitation to give the lecture upon which it is based. Though I have discussed this topic with many colleagues over the years, I take full responsibility for all views expressed.

2. The most comprehensive discussion of the Homeric sources is H. L. Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments* (London, 1950), now rather outdated but still very valuable. The most recent survey of the topic in some detail is J. V. Luce, *Homer and the Heroic Age* (London, 1975). The most accessible and comprehensive discussion of the Dark Age is A. M. Snodgrass, *The Dark Age of Greece* (Edinburgh, 1971); V. R. Desborough, *The Greek Dark Ages* (London, 1972) covers the eleventh and tenth centuries, and J. N. Coldstream, *Geometric Greece* (London, 1977) the ninth and eighth, with greater concentration on archaeological detail.

3. The most consistent proponent of a specifically Dark Age setting for the poems has been Sir Moses Finley, principally in *The World of Odysseus* (London, 2nd ed. 1977). Some important comments are made by G. S. Kirk, *CAH*³ Vol. II:2, Ch. XXXIX(b), and A. M. Snodgrass, *JHS* 94 (1974), 114–25; see also J. Chadwick, *Diogenes* 77 (1972), 1–13.

4. *Greece in the Bronze Age* (Chicago, 1964), p. x.

5. Finley, op. cit., p. 17.

6. Some of these points were made as long ago as M. P. Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1932), pp. 3–4, 31, 187; see also for general comments J. R. Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 30–34, and for more specific comments relevant to Homer and Greek mythology Finley, op. cit., pp. 47, 170–1, and P. Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia* (London, 1979), Ch. 5 and Appendix 2. On the Irish material see D. Ó. Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), pp. 74–78.

7. Stesichorus seems to have been the first to associate Agamemnon and Orestes with Sparta; Pindar (*Pythians* 11.32) has Amyclae. The motive is surely the legitimization of Spartan claims to primacy in the Peloponnese as against Argos; cf. Cartledge, op. cit., pp. 138–9, and Hdt. 7.159.

8. J. Chadwick, *The Mycenaean World* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 183.

9. *CQ* 67 (1973), 179–92, especially 187–8.

10. *Il.* 23.826–35.

11. The recent illustration, in the last programme of *In Search of the Trojan War*, of specifically Late Helladic IIIC sherds as from Troy VIIA introduces a new dimension to the discussion, since it would indicate that the destruction of Troy VIIA *must* post-date the destruction of the Mycenaean palaces! However, in this paper I have chosen to discuss the traditional association of the Trojan War with the world of the palaces, because it dominates the literature.

12. See, e.g., J. Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (London, 1982), *passim*; also N. K. Sandars, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London, 1960), pp. 73, 83, 86, 93.
13. See M. R. Popham, L. H. Sackett, and P. G. Themelis, *Lefkandi I* (Oxford, 1980), especially pp. 168–96 on the Toumba cemetery (on which see also *BSA* 77 (1982), 213–48), and M. R. Popham, E. Touloupa, and L. H. Sackett, *Antiquity* 56 (1982), 169–76 on the 'Heroön'.
14. Anticleia's words (*Od.* 11.218–22) imply that it is normal, as does its use for the Greek and Trojan dead in general (*Il.* 7.417–32) and for the insignificant Elpenor (*Od.* 12.11–15); in no case is there a suggestion that it is an abnormal rite forced by circumstance, as the theory that it was adopted from the Trojans during the Trojan War would require.
15. D. Kurtz and J. Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (London, 1971), p. 27; the larnakes are in fact earlier than suggested there.
16. See most recently W. Burkett, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 43–46 on the Linear B evidence, 51–52 on the absence of Apollo and Aphrodite (and 47–53 generally on continuity into and through the Dark Age), 149 with n. 3 on doubts over Artemis, and Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 88 on doubts over Athena. Pa-ja-wo = Paieon is a separate god from Apollo even in Homer (*Il.* 6.899–900, *Od.* 4.232), so cannot represent him.
17. Delphi as an oracle, *Od.* 8.79–81, as wealthy, surely because of dedications, *Il.* 9.904–5.
18. *Od.* 19.226–31; the closest parallels seem late eighth or seventh century.
19. Lorimer, *op. cit.*, pp. 377–83 is an extensive discussion of the Homeric sources.
20. *Il.* 14.182–3, *Od.* 18.296–7; cf. Popham, Sackett, and Themelis, *op. cit.*, p. 221, Pl. 231d; *BSA* 77 (1982), Pl. 30(b) shows a related form. See R. Higgins, *Greek and Roman Jewellery* (London, 1961), pp. 72–73 on Mycenaean earrings generally.
21. See the discussion in Coldstream, *op. cit.*, pp. 334–8.
22. *Archaeological Reports for 1979–80*, 29, Fig. 50: a sherd from Tiryns.
23. Lorimer, *op. cit.*, p. 273; *CAH*³ III: 1, p. 531.
24. Probably the latest context is a Sub-Minoan grave at Knossos (*Archaeological Reports for 1982–83*, 53); see Luce, *op. cit.*, pp. 103–4 for some other late contexts and representations. For the Delos plaque see *CAH*³ Plates to Vols I and II, Pl. 124(c), and on the context, Coldstream, *op. cit.*, p. 215.
25. Especially A. M. Snodgrass, *Early Greek Armour and Weapons* (Edinburgh, 1964), fig. 15b; in fig. 27 and in *BSA* 67 (1972), pls. 5c, 10a, the shields look long, but the whole leg below the knee seems to be shown.
26. See Coldstream, *op. cit.*, pp. 287–8.
27. J. H. Crouwel, *Chariots and Other Means of Land Transport in Bronze Age Greece* (Amsterdam, 1981), Ch. VI, especially pp. 121–4; also Crouwel, *BICS* 25 (1978), 174–5.
28. Crouwel, *op. cit.*, pp. 72–73, also 143–4 on likely obsolescence.
29. *Il.* 6.242–50; cf. Lorimer, *op. cit.*, p. 431.
30. On this general topic, see M. O. Knox, *CQ* 67 (1973), 1–21, and H. Plommer, *JHS* 97 (1977), 75–83. Unit IV–1 in its later form at Nichoria (W. A. McDonald, W. D. E. Coulson, and J. Rosser, *Excavations at Nichoria in Southwest Greece Vol. III* (Minneapolis, 1983), pp. 33–40) has a side-entrance, also a small fenced yard; it is probably ninth century, at latest early eighth, in date.
31. *Od.* 6.9–10 and 262–7.
32. J. D. Muhly, *Berytus* 19 (1970), 17–64.
33. *The Catalogue of Ships in Homer's Iliad* (Oxford, 1970).
34. Apart from the reference in the Catalogue of Ships, it is named at *Il.* 4.52, *Od.* 1.93 and 285, 2.214, 327, and 359, 4.10, 11.460, and 13.412, frequently as the equivalent of Nestor's Pylos and/or in the company of other known towns, Mycenae, Argos, and Orchomenos. As noted by Cartledge, *op. cit.*, p. 338, the name of the Menelaion site, the most important known in late Mycenaean Laconia, was most probably Therapne; its absence from the Catalogue presents yet another problem to the 'Mycenaean' interpretation, since it was occupied in both the thirteenth and twelfth centuries.
35. See A. Giovannini, *Étude Historique sur les Origines du Catalogue des Vaisseaux* (Berne, 1969), pp. 25, 31. This neglected study has gathered a great deal of useful information on the existence in the seventh century and later, so probably earlier too, of the majority of the Catalogue sites, though the ultimate conclusion, that the Catalogue is based on the itinerary of Delphic *thearodokoi*, is hard to accept.

36. *Minos* 14 (1973), 57.

37. See for example Hope Simpson and Lazenby, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 (Hyria), 44 (Lilaia), 128 (Alope), and on Dorion p. 85, with which compare W. A. McDonald and R. Hope Simpson, *AJA* 73 (1969), 141, under Malthi (Vasiliko). Giovannini's comments on the assumptions involved in the identification of Hyria, Dorion, and also Pylos and Krisa, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–21, seem perfectly just.

38. West, *op. cit.*, 191–2.

39. *Op. cit.*, pp. 162–9; cf. also Hope Simpson, *Mycenaean Greece* (New Jersey, 1981), p. 251.

40. Thuc. 1.12.3; the explanation for their presence in the Trojan War is notably lame, since what is in question is not some Boeotians but a contingent representing almost the whole of Classical Boeotia.

41. Cf. Chadwick, *Minos* 14 (1973), 55–8; the references in *Od.* 3.4 and 386–7 imply a virtually coastal location.

42. *Il.* 4.376–81, the excuse being that Zeus sent bad omens.

43. Cf. *Il.* 2.572 and Hdt. 5.67.

44. E.g. *Od.* 11.184–7, where Telemachus takes it in turn to be host and guest, 'as a justice-dealing man should', the implication being that those who feast him are also justice-dealing men of comparable status; cf. *Il.* 18.503–6; also *Od.* 21.21, when Odysseus' father 'and the other elders' send him on a public errand.

45. *Od.* 4.622–3, a reference not normally cited, to my knowledge.

46. *Od.* 4.81–85, 90–91; cf. 128–9 for Menelaos, 19–283–6, 293–5 for Odysseus.

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