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HOMER

ILIAD

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Translated by

A. T. MURRAY

Revised by

WILLIAM F. WYATT

HOMER

ILIAD

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WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY

藏书章
A. T. MURPHY

REVISED BY

WILLIAM F. WYATT



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PREFACE

A. T. Murray's translation of the *Iliad* has long set a standard for accuracy and style. But its archaic language no longer seems as appropriate as it did to earlier generations of readers. In revising it to fit the expectations of today's readers I have changed little substantively, but have modernized the diction throughout. I accepted the task and challenge both because of my love of Homer and out of familial piety, for Murray was my great uncle, my grandmother's brother.

I thank Zeph Stewart and George Goold for selecting me to undertake this task and for other help and advice; and Philippa Goold for reading through my translation, making useful suggestions for improvement, and saving me from occasional error. I hope that my revision of Murray, like his original, will Nestor-like serve through two generations and into a third.

W. F. W.

ILIAD

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INTRODUCTION

There was a rich tradition of epic poetry in early Greece. We know of epics dealing with legends of the royal house of Thebes, with the voyage of the Argo, with the deeds of Heracles and of Theseus, with the events surrounding the Greek expedition against Troy, and with many other myths and legends of the Heroic Age. Apart from brief quotations and later paraphrases or allusions all but two of them have perished. The two that have survived, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were from earliest times attributed to the same poet, Homer, and appear to have been valued above all others for their quality and authority. Both dealt with the Trojan War, the *Iliad* centering on an incident in the final year of the Greek siege of Troy, the *Odyssey* recounting the long return home of one of the commanders after the victory.

Even in antiquity a few thought, as many do today, that the *Odyssey* was not composed by the same poet as the *Iliad*, but no one doubted that each was the work of a single poet. An era of scepticism, however, began at the end of the eighteenth century. Following the suggestions of F. A. Wolf and others, scholars argued that both epics had been woven or patched together from shorter poems composed at different times by various poets. This view, which dominated most critical discussion for more than a century,

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seemed to explain the inconsistencies and repetitions found in the epics and to confront the fact that writing was not known in the Dark Ages. There was speculation about the very existence of Homer and what contribution a bard of that name might have made to the epics in their present form. These problems came to be known as "the Homeric question." In antiquity the term *chorizontes*, "separators," was given to those who ascribed the two epics each to a different poet; now it could be applied to those who believed that for each epic there was multiple authorship and not a single unifying origin.

A revolutionary change of view followed upon the investigations of Milman Parry, who in the 1920s and 1930s showed that the method of composition of the epics resembled the practice of illiterate bards. They should therefore not be judged by the criteria of written literature. So it is possible again, and now with more sophisticated theoretical and comparative evidence, to visualize a single bard as the author of a whole epic. Whether the same poet produced the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* remains a disputed question. Separate authorship for the *Odyssey* has by no means been proved, however, and until it is we would do well to follow the practice of the centuries and think of a single poet named Homer as the author of both epics.

Study of the narrative poetry of illiterate cultures has made it clear that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, traditionally 15,693 and 12,110 lines long respectively, are examples of "oral poetry." Professional singers like Phemius and Demodocus in the *Odyssey* learn by listening to their predecessors' performances a version of their own native language which obeys not only that language's grammatical rules, but also the metrical or other formal rules of the

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poetic medium. In this poetic language the singer can think, and while doing so produce consistently metrical utterance. The oft-repeated metrical phrases or "formulas," each designed to dovetail with the next, aided the poet in his composition.

At *Iliad* 2.484-93 Homer names the source both of the singer's poetic language and of its content:

Tell me now, you Muses, who have dwellings on Olympus—for you are goddesses, and are present, and know all things, but we hear only a rumor and know nothing—who were the leaders and lords of the Danaans. But the multitude I could not tell or name, not even if ten tongues were mine and ten mouths and a voice unwearying, and the heart within me were of bronze, unless the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus who bears the aegis, call to my mind all those who came beneath Ilios. Now will I tell the leaders of the ships and all the ships.

From these words we can conclude that whatever occurs to the singer's mind and sensibility in the muses' metrical language as he begins his song is for him the guaranteed truth of divine eyewitnesses. This "Catalogue of Ships," which from our point of view we can explain only as a feat of memorization of traditional material, is ostensibly for the poet and his audience the voice of Truth itself.

Since he thought of himself as the mouthpiece of Truth, it would not be surprising if the poet sought and found in his consultation of the muse or muses larger unities than could be communicated in an evening's performance. Hence the many thousands of lines of the *Iliad* and

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of the *Odyssey*, entailing also the eventual division of the poems into 24 “books,” each identified by a letter of the Greek alphabet.

Mention of the Greek alphabet brings us at once to Homer’s first manuscripts. His orally composed words, in order to survive, had immediately to be subjected to the writing process, whether by autograph or dictation. The possibility that Homer’s poetry was orally transmitted from bard to bard until it was finally written down seems excluded by the fact that oral poets never repeat themselves at any length word for word, whatever they may claim to the contrary.¹ If by “Homer” we mean the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Homer himself produced the first texts of the poems we read today.

The weight of scholarly opinion now places the composition of the poems in the mid-eighth century B.C., the *Iliad* a little earlier than the *Odyssey*. The sixth-century Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo and the scholiast on Pindar *Nemeans* 2.1 on the Homeridae provide attractive evidence that Homer founded a clan or guild on the island of Chios which possessed written texts and continued to foster their honored ancestor’s reputation after his death. To the degree that we accept this we can think of Homer as the eighth-century B.C. Ionian Greek who first brought literacy to Greece and, in a sense, to the world.

The oldest complete manuscripts of the *Iliad* are of the tenth century, and they provide a remarkably stable and consistent text. The earliest surviving papyri (3rd century

¹ Adam Parry, ed., *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, p. 336.

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B.C.) and quotations of Homer in classical authors show, however, that at an earlier stage there were many differences from the text we now possess. The standardization was undoubtedly due to the labors of scholars at the library of Alexandria in the third and second centuries B.C., especially of the prominent heads, Zenodotus, Aristophanes of Byzantium, and Aristarchus, who compared different versions and commented on the text. Many of their observations are preserved in the scholia, the annotations which appear in the margins of some manuscripts, including their questioning of lines and passages for linguistic, factual, or ethical reasons. There are suggestions also of a much earlier attempt to collect and standardize the Homeric epics for recitation at Athens at the time of Pisistratus in the sixth century B.C. Study and interpretation of the poems continued throughout antiquity and is often reflected in the scholia.

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