



G. S. KIRK

THE SONGS

OF HOMER

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BY

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THE
SONGS OF HOMER

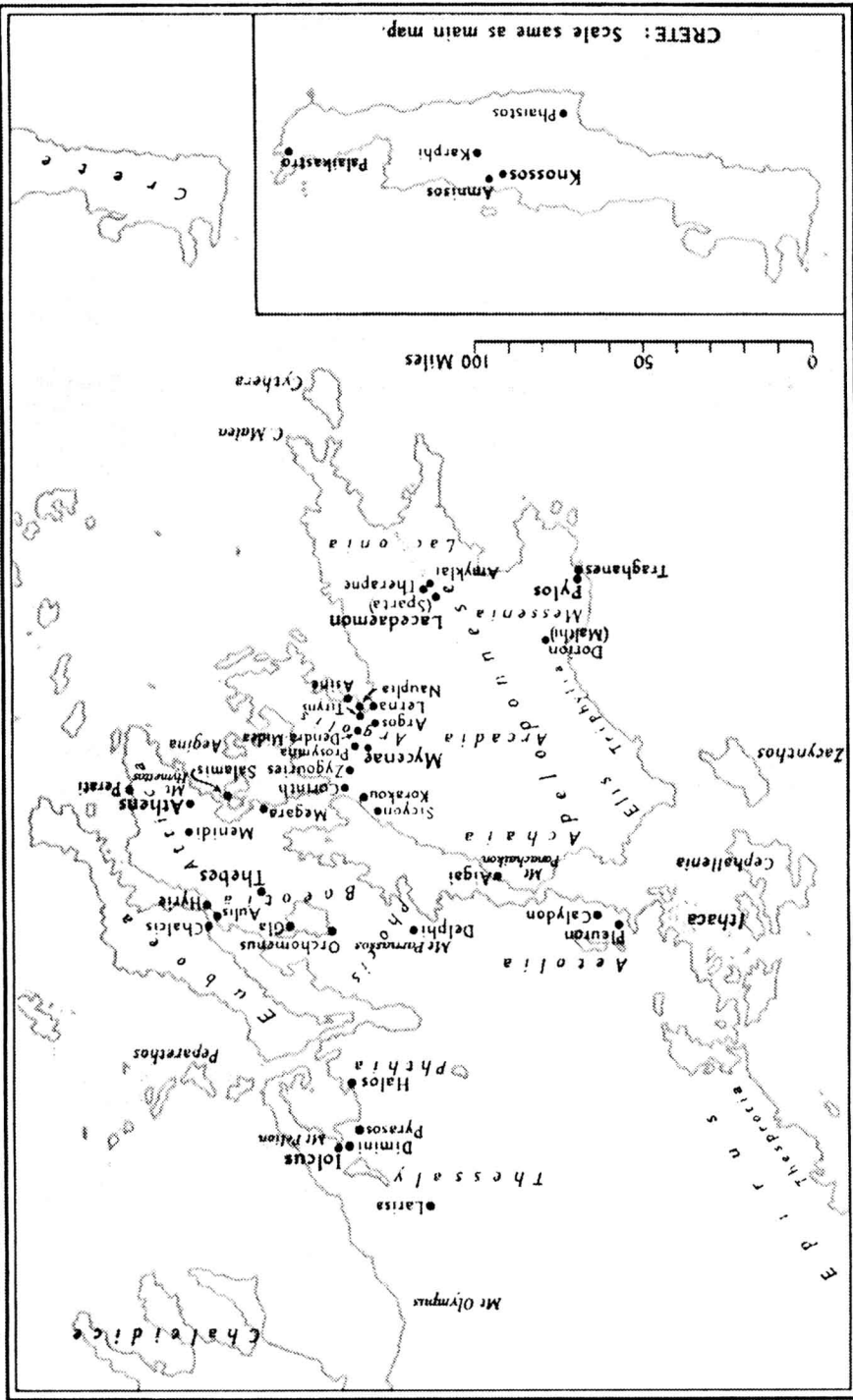
To
D. L. PAGE
and
M. I. FINLEY

MAPS AND PLATES

The maps are printed on pp. x and xi. The plates are bound in as a section between pp. 406 and 409.

CRETE: Scale same as main map.

0 50 100 Miles





PREFACE

The Songs of Homer are the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. I have tried to develop a comprehensive and unified view of their nature, of their relation to the oral heroic poetry of the Dark Age and beyond, and of their creation as monumental poems by two great singers in the eighth century B.C. No one who writes on Homer can either expect or deserve common assent; yet at certain points I may hope at least to have clarified the issues, at others to have introduced a kind of salutary agnosticism. The book is intended to interest not only classical scholars and students, but also amateurs of literature and oral poetry who may know no Greek. These will find four or five patches of linguistic discussion which they will simply have to skip; otherwise all Greek passages are translated. It is not only for their sake that notes and references outside the main text have been kept as few as possible. Indeed at the present stage of Homeric studies, when the systematization of archaeology and the profounder understanding of oral song have transformed the appearance of many long-established problems, much of the work of the past, valuable though it has often been, need not always be specifically mentioned.

I make no apology for the space devoted to the historical and poetical background of the poems. The Homeric poetry is the culmination of a long tradition, and without knowing as much as possible about that tradition one can hardly begin to understand (though one might still enjoy) the poetry itself. Yet old attitudes die hard; and there are many scholars who pay lip-service to the study of oral poetry, but still think that they can carve up the whole of the poems among specific contributors. Even so, not all of the old Analytical attitudes and techniques are utterly obsolete, nor all of the Unitarian. Reinterpreted, they may have their value. In part IV, for instance, I have deliberately concentrated on the internal qualities, in terms of coherence and incoherence, of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* themselves,

PREFACE

and have temporarily withheld attention from the probabilities of an oral tradition. In part VI, on the other hand, I have written about the poems as unities, as works of art, with questions of composition left largely in the background. On the poems as literature some things need not be said, others cannot, and disagreement there will certainly be; but I would remind one type of reader that to regard all of Homer as precisely equal in literary virtue is obviously naïve.

Whatever errors and imperfections remain in my book, many have certainly been prevented by those who read through all or part of it before publication. There cannot, indeed, be many places better than Cambridge in which to write on Homer; it contains, for example, D. L. Page, M. I. Finley and J. Chadwick, experts and friends who have given the most careful and ungrudging attention to my typescript, and the first two of whom encouraged me to write this book from the beginning. W. A. Camps, too, read the proofs and eradicated further anomalies; and so, as he has done before, did P. H. J. Lloyd-Jones in Oxford. Others to whom I owe special thanks are G. L. Huxley, Emily Vermeule and other friends at or around Harvard; and, for their help over illustrations, R. M. Cook, N. Coldstream, P. Courbin, G. Daux, V. R. d'A. Desborough, P. Devambez, M. S. Hood, E. Kunze, A. B. Lord, T. C. Skeat, F. H. Stubbings, Gladys Weinberg and N. M. Verdels. E. R. Dodds, A. Lesky and H. Erbse are mentioned little or not at all in what follows, yet I like many others have been greatly helped by what they have written.

Finally that perennial problem, the spelling of Greek names: no single system is quite satisfactory, and the rule followed here is roughly that familiar names are given in their most familiar Latinized forms, unfamiliar ones in a more direct transliteration retaining *k* and *os*. This explains some apparent inconsistencies of place-names in the maps.

G. S. K.

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PART I



THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF
THE HOMERIC POEMS

1

THE RISE OF MYCENAE

THE Iliad and Odyssey are set against the background of the Achaeae world in the late Bronze Age; their subjects are the Trojan war and its aftermath. Yet the poems themselves did not approach their surviving monumental form until many generations later, at some time, to give the extreme limits, between the late 9th and the early 7th century B.C. Many elements of the poems reflect the conditions, not of their ostensible Mycenaean setting, but of this later period of large-scale composition in Ionia. Between the two periods came centuries of obscurity, the so-called Dark Age of Greece, through which the Achaeae traditional material must have been transmitted and during which it was no doubt greatly altered or elaborated.

To comprehend the making of the Homeric poems, therefore, one must first consider the history of at least a complete millennium, from around 1600 to around 600 B.C. In a historical novel the critic has to consider both the period described and that of the author and his readers; but with traditional poems the whole intervening period, too, is vitally important. Now the assessment of this particular millennium is more than usually difficult since, apart from the Linear B inventories from Knossos, Pylos and Mycenae, the Homeric poems themselves, and a few Hittite and Egyptian references, there exists no contemporary record until the 7th century.¹ Much of the reconstruction, therefore, has to be founded on later mythological tradition, itself often derived from or at least affected by Homer, and on archaeological evidence—together, at one or two points, with the evidence of non-Greek proper names that survived into the historical age. All these kinds of evidence, particularly the first two, are erratic in scope and ambiguous of interpretation.

The late Bronze Age in Greece began around 1600 B.C., and its antecedents were briefly as follows. A Neolithic or late Stone Age people of unknown race, but using pottery of Near Eastern affinities, had occupied parts of central Greece and the Peloponnese from an uncertain date, perhaps in the 5th millennium B.C., until the incursion of bronze-users around 2800.¹ The term 'Helladic' is applied to the succeeding Bronze Age cultures of the mainland, with which we are chiefly concerned; 'Minoan' refers to the Bronze Age cultures of Crete, 'Cycladic' to those of the central Aegean. This earliest Bronze Age culture of the mainland is called Early Helladic. It appears to have crossed over into Greece from Asia Minor, since it has at first no northern connexions and since in the Early Helladic period a common language seems to have been spoken not only on the mainland and in Crete and the central islands but also in south-western Anatolia.² Between about 2000 and 1850 the Early Helladic was succeeded by a new culture known as Middle Helladic. This was introduced by people who imposed themselves by force upon the earlier population, some of whose settlements were destroyed and others rebuilt. The new people were presumably immigrants and not a resurgent pre-Helladic stock. They may have moved down into Greece from central Europe, a region into which one Indo-European tribe, the so-called Battle-axe people, had already penetrated during the Early Helladic period. It is possible, though, that they moved along the north shore of the Aegean from Asia Minor and then turned south into the Greek peninsula. One notable characteristic of their new culture was the introduction of the horse; another was wheel-made pottery, in contrast with the rougher, hand-made Early Helladic ware. The most characteristic Middle Helladic pottery was made by the so-called 'Minyan' technique, which produced a highly burnished surface giving the impression of metal. Minyan ware is usually grey, but in certain areas and at certain periods it is red, black, or yellowish.³ A third cultural characteristic of the Middle Helladic immigrants was the fortification of towns.⁴ They do not seem to have been a particularly warlike people, but unlike most of their

predecessors they must have reached a stage of economic and social development at which concentrated settlements and administrative centres were possible and necessary. These would presumably require defence, at first, against a surrounding subject population. A fourth innovation was a special kind of building, the *megaron*, a gabled hall with central hearth and sometimes a small antechamber at one of the narrow ends. Although an ancestor of this architectural type had been known in Thessaly and at Troy since the third millennium, the Middle Helladic invaders were the first to use it widely in Greece.

The fifth contribution of the Middle Helladic immigrants was a new language—Greek. The Early Helladic settlers had not been Greek-speakers. So much can be inferred with certainty from the survival into the historical period of a particular class of non-Greek names—mostly local names, of rivers and mountains and inhabited settlements, but also names of flowers, trees, and even a few common artefacts. These names are characterized by a medial *-nth-* sound (or its probable equivalent *-nd-* in Anatolia) and also by medial *-ss-*. These internal consonant-groups occur in many names that do not seem to be Greek—but also in a few like *ἄνθος*, *ἄκανθος* that do. It now seems doubtful whether they should be considered as non-Indo-European—that is, as foreign to the whole language-group of which Greek is a member. Examples of such names on the Greek mainland and in the islands are: Erymanthos, Tiryns (*-nthos*), Korinthos, Kynthos; Parnassos, Hymettos (with Attic *-tt-* for *-ss-*), Kephissos, Laris(s)a; the botanical names hyakinthos, erebinthos; kyparissos, narkissos; asaminthos (a kind of bath). In Crete: Syrinthos; labyrinthos; Knos(s)os, Tylis(s)os. In Anatolia: Myndos, Labraunda (so too Lindos in Rhodes), also Xanthos; Mylasa, Telmessos. These names were used by the early Bronze Age inhabitants of these areas, but are not Neolithic remnants: that is shown by their occurrence in Crete and the Cyclades, for example in the name of Mount Kynthos in Delos, where no Neolithic remains have been found; and by their being commonest in the known areas of early Bronze Age settlement. That