

INTRODUCTION

THE FIELD OF HOMERIC STUDIES IS VAST, MARKED BY HEATED debates and unresolved issues. One of the most contentious issues is the authorship of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Some of the pieces of this puzzle relate to the identity of the creator(s) of the poems and the place and date of composition. Others pertain to the ways in which the Homeric epics are connected with oral tradition, literacy, and other early Greek epics. And other pieces concern the degree to which the epic portrayal of objects, sociopolitical norms, economic activities, religious beliefs, and geography reflect historical realities.

Given the complexity of these issues, any effort to understand the processes that shaped the creation of Greek epic poetry in general, and the Homeric epics in particular, requires a wide disciplinary perspective. This book represents an effort to explain the emergence of Greek epic poetry using an integrated, cross-disciplinary method that draws from different fields. Its focus is the emergence and early development of the poems; their later history is out of the scope of this study.

Recent advances make such a “unified-field” approach possible. Archaeologists now possess not only a better understanding of the material record of the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and the Early Iron Age (EIA), but also a deeper appreciation of how physical ruins and material remains of the past influenced the survival of oral tradition after the collapse of the Mycenaean palaces. Philologists have shed new light on the cross-fertilization between the poems of the Epic Cycle and the Homeric epics, as well as the common mythological tradition from which they appear to descend. Historians have advanced our knowledge of the sociopolitical contexts of different periods that the epics incorporate. Specialists in performance studies and oral tradition have offered new insights on the role of composition-in-performance in shaping the epics. Thanks to all these scholars, we are now in a position to

assess the dynamic interplay between the material remains of the past (and the collective memories they evoke) and the rich oral tradition of heroic narratives that eventually crystallized into hexameter epic poetry.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I examines the history and current state of Homeric studies, focusing on the debates about authorship and the complex relationship between the epics and early Greek historical realities. It addresses pivotal issues, such as whether Homer was an actual historical figure, the possible circumstances that could have enabled the composition of these poems, and how scholarly views on dating and authorship have changed over time.

Part II analyzes the social, political, economic, military, and religious aspects of the world of the Homeric epics, in an effort to identify which elements of the poems may have been historical and to determine the periods to which such elements could be traced. For each topic discussed, the Homeric evidence is first reviewed and then compared to the textual and archaeological evidence for the Mycenaean period, the EIA, and the early Archaic period. The objective is not to try to reconstruct history from the epics, a precarious and slippery enterprise, but rather to use these historical elements to understand the cultural milieu that led to the emergence of the epics and the extent to which historical reality impacted poetic inspiration and composition.

The discussion of the various aspects of the Homeric World in Part II is by necessity formulaic and, at times, lengthy and detailed, because it forms the foundation for assessing the historical subtext of the epics. Chapter 4 on political geography is particularly extensive, covering every contingent in the Greek Catalogue and discussing the LBA and EIA sites in each region. While this level of detail may be tedious for non-specialists, it is intended to provide the information needed to clarify the topographic image of the epics in relation to the situation on the ground. Readers who are not interested in the minutiae of the archaeological record can skip the detailed discussion and focus on the conclusions of each chapter.

Part III examines the processes by which the historical elements of the epics merged into the pre-Homeric mythological and poetic tradition and how that tradition, in turn, shaped the oral poems that eventually crystallized in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The discussion unfolds along two axes: social memory, particularly the interplay between material culture and oral tradition; and the settings and contexts of epic composition.

The three parts of this book aim to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the complex processes involved in the emergence of Greek epic poetry. By examining these narratives within their broader historical,

cultural, and literary contexts, I seek to investigate not only the origins of the epics, but also their relationship to social memory, historical reality, and the circumstances of their composition. Through this multifaceted approach, I hope to contribute to the ongoing discourse in Homeric studies by offering a more nuanced understanding of the factors that shaped the creation and development of these seminal works of ancient Greek literature.

