

Historical Truth Preserved

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The Iliad of Homer translated by Alexander Pope. Edited, and with an Introduction and Textual Notes, by Reuben A. Brower and William H. Bond. Macmillan Co., 1965

Introduction pp. 9-32 by Reuben A. Brower who is described on the jacket as Professor of English and Master of Adams House at Harvard University. In addition to his Alexander Pope: The Poetry of Allusion, he is the author of The Fields of Light: An Experiment in Critical Readings, The Poetry of Robert Frost: Constellations of Intention, and editor of On Translation. He has contributed to a number of other books, and his articles have appeared widely in magazines and journals.

The Translation and Its Publication pp. 33 - 38 by Dr. W. H. Bond is described as librarian of the Houghton Library and Lecturer on Bibliography at Harvard University. He has edited Christopher Smart's Jubilate Agno and compiled the Supplement to the Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada.

Introduction, p. 17 by R.A.B.

We must not think of the last great period of Mycenaean civilization as a golden age of peace and plenty, but rather as an era of warlike chieftans and their followers, who made frequent raids on one another and on the territories of various Mediterranean peoples, including the Hittites and the Egyptians. This period, the Heroic Age of the Greek world, is recalled, much altered by the deceptions of memory and imagination, in Homer's Iliad. There are only a few details in the poem that can be surely identified as Mycenaean, such as the body-covering shield of "great Ajax" and the boar's tusk helmet of the Cretan hero, Meriones.

Other archaeological features of the poem - casual references to iron weapons, the round shield, fighting in close "hoplite" formation - belonging to the centuries that follow the downfall of Mycenae, anywhere from the eleventh to the eighth century B.C., a very dark period indeed. It is during this period that the geometric style of vase-painting, the first distinctly Greek style in art, emerges. The Iliad as we know it must have been composed in Ionian, on the coast of Asia Minor, toward the end of the eighth century; this is the time when Homer lived and sung.

Myres, Sir John L. Homer and His Critics (London: Routledge + Kegan Paul) 1958

The Homeric World

186 War-chariots were used both in the Bronze Age and in the eighth century. The pictorial evidence for tactics is not conclusive, but there is nothing on eighth-century vases inconsistent with Homeric fighting; men and chariots appear together, but no fighter ever attacks from a chariot and no chariot charge is ever shown . . . Races and processions of chariots and foot-soldiers at funerals are certainly eighth century, and the vividness and consistency of Homeric narrative are themselves evidence that the fighting described was contemporary. The Mycenaeans, on the other hand, were in touch with peoples who charged in their chariots, and . . . and the Hittites in particular mounted spearmen.