

Beye, C. R., The Iliad, The Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition, 1966

p. 35 mentality of a copy editor; he is devoted to bringing order out of confusion, clarity out of obscurity. Editors have an objectivity that creators rarely possess. Why must we assume that they were so unaware of what they were doing? If inconsistency is the characterizing feature of these hypothetical editors who certainly could not be far removed in time from the supposed authors of the poems, why is it not likely that they had simply discovered that inconsistency was one in the bag of epic tricks? . . .

. . . Upon reading Athene's speech over anyone can say that its contradictions nullify any emotional impact it might have. The poet, however, had no intention of its being read over; he certainly would not even have considered repeating it orally. Each successive item may contradict; but there is no going back to be sure. An atmosphere of uncertainty, of crisis, of suspense, and of expectation is generated by the speech. The plot is launched emotionally and several possible solutions are ready. Beyond this the audience is left in the dark and must pay

p.36/ attention to find the answers. The relatively glaring inconsistency is an insult to the intelligence of a reader; to an auditor, especially to a seasoned auditor of epic recital, it is an element of style that demands toleration of inconsistency, if, indeed, the inconsistency were noticed, as the rhythmical train of language continued.

p. 39 The poem represents a curious amalgam of different historical periods. . . . The description of the boar's tooth helmet that Meriones gives to Odysseus in the tenth book of the Iliad is an interesting heirloom, for it describes an item made in part of perishable material which held the teeth together. Such a helmet could never have survived the end of the Mycenaean period, and yet the description is so exact that archaeologists can easily figure out from the remaining fragments of these helmets found in graves how to reconstruct them. This is an excellent example of the manner in which the language and formulae hold fast to elements that were contemporaneous several centuries earlier, but by the date of the final recitation were objects beyond the experience of the bard.

p. 40 It is possible to describe a boar's tooth helmet without knowing one and be in little trouble. Homer gets involved in more complicated confusions in battle narrative where changing styles in battle equipment cannot be reconciled. The differences between fighting in the Mycenaean period and in the period in which Homer lived are not too many, but they do sometimes affect the battle descriptions.

p. 62 As I mentioned earlier there is a definite confusion in the Iliad on the matter of shields. The Mycenaean shield was large, covering the whole man, having a kind of indentation resembling a wasp waist in the middle between the top and the bottom. From this point the man could peek out to seek his enemy. Such a shield is cumbersome, and very heavy, perhaps accounting for the exclusive use of chariots. No man could go far on foot with such a burden . . . , nor could he manage one from horseback. . . .

Later, however, the mode and dress of battle changed. Everyone was armed, they fought together, moving about on foot in a phalanx pattern. They used throwing spears and also their swords more . . . Their protection consisted of a much smaller (easily portable) round shield. This together with the shields of his neighbors gave each man security. It was this shield that called for greaves and breastplates. The tower shield gave ample protection for the whole body; the smaller round shield, on the contrary, was p. 63/ ward off obvious direct blows, and left much of the body exposed. Homer conflates the two traditions, but so confidently that his battle narratives seem whole to all but trained archaeologists. meant to