

Samuel, Alan E., The Mycenaeans In History (Prentice-Hall, Inc.) 1966

Preface, cont'd p. xiii

Thus, Homer provides no real evidence for history. We see none of the bureaucratic administration to which the Linear B tablets attest, and much of the artistic and architectural grandeur of Mycenaean society is missing from his verses. It would be dangerous indeed to use any unconfirmed statement in Homer as evidence for the nature of Mycenaean civilization; conversely, with the evidence from excavation, we do not need Homer. Thus, questions about the date and purpose of the Trojan War, the political organization of Greece, or the relations between the great Greek kings who appear in the Iliad will eventually be resolved by archaeologists and historians. The poems alone can tell us no more than they did before Schliemann turned his first shovelful of earth. Homer belongs to literature, not to history.

There is a great deal more in Greek tradition than Homer to be set aside. Although we do not hear so often of the information in the later Greek literary tradition, much in Greek drama refers to the same period as did Homer. No historian has felt compunction at dismissing this evidence, and the reasons for this are essentially the same as those which disqualify Homer's. There is also information about the Bronze Age in the works of the ancient Greek historians, and although some of this had proved accurate, some has turned out to be wrong, and a great deal remains untested or unprovable. This information too was filtered through the oral tradition and cannot be accepted without the confirmation which makes it unnecessary. This is even more true of the work of the late Greek chronographers, who tried to put the accounts of poets and historians in some kind of rational and chronological order. Their success often may have been gained at the expense of accuracy. Though their works, if ^{p. xiv} right could give us a date for the fall of Mycenaean civilization or the Trojan War (if it was fought), we have yet no test for their accuracy. Anyway, they conflict.

The safest course is to set aside all information which is inherently unreliable. This means that our account will be somewhat limited, depending as it does on the