

Polity and Society (i) The Homeric Picture - W. Calhoun (cont'd)

Efforts of critics to divide and classify what the poet says about the condition of the dead and to arrange the data in neat subdivisions, each logically coherent and corresponding nicely to a particular stage in religious evolution, have failed signally. . . . the common notions about ghosts vary infinitely, and this not only for different times but for different localities as well. Homer was not constructing a system of doctrine on immortality, but composing poetry; he took what he wanted where he found it, . . . he was not troubled by inconsistencies in topography or theology. (p.448)

Problem to the critic is that so much in Homer seems more advanced and more civilized than the religious notions and practices found centuries later in the golden age of Greek culture. (p.448)

Marriage

The gifts spoken of in connection with marriage are oftenest given by the bridegroom to the bride's father . . . , but several passages point to gifts from the bride's father or kin . . . The former suggest the bride-price and primitive marriage by purchase, the latter the dowry so common in the historical period. Attempts to establish two separate stages of development, corresponding to two strata of composition, have not been more successful than other like efforts of the higher criticism, and there is really nothing against the possibility that gifts of both types were made. (p.452)

(ii) Historical Commentary - T.B.L. Webster

It is, however, becoming increasingly possible to date the different elements in this picture and to say that here Homer has preserved a Mycenaena memory, whereas there he is thinking of his own times.

. . . we have knowledge that our Iliad and Odyssey is the final product of a long tradition of poetry which has preserved stories, atmosphere, and phrasing of all dates from at least the fifteenth century to the eighth. (p. 453)

It is too early to say yet how we should interpret the women or men from Corinth, etc. . . . who appear on the Pylos tablets . . . The tablets show nothing to contradict the Homeric picture of a major expedition led by the ruler of the most powerful state, to whom the other states owed some sort of allegiance. (p.453)

The recent excavations in Chios have revealed a small town at Emporio, which was apparently founded by the beginning of the eighth century and lasted until the end of the seventh. About fifty houses were discovered grouped round an acropolis, containing a large house and a temple of Athene . . . This seems to be the kind of unit of which the state in Homer's own time was composed, a temple and a great house and a number of small houses. (p.454)

Most of the crafts and skills remained unchanged from the Mycenaean period until Homeric times, and when they are described in similes, as many of them are, Homer is likely to be thinking of his own day. (p. 460)

. . . it is not surprising that, where the women on the Mycenaean tablets have adjectives describing their activities, these activities can be for the most part paralleled in Homer. (p. 460). But when Homer gives Odysseys fifty women slaves . . . he is imagining a royal household far bigger than any that is likely to have existed in eighth-century Ionia but far smaller than the royal household of thirteenth-century Pylos: . . . (p. 460)