

Zeitschrift:	Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica
Herausgeber:	Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft
Band:	17 (1960)
Heft:	4
Artikel:	Objective dating criteria in Homer
Autor:	Kirk, G.S.
DOI:	https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-16617

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 08.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Objective Dating Criteria in Homer

By G. S. Kirk, Cambridge

1. This paper is not concerned with the external evidence for the date of composition of the monumental epics (for example the date offered by Herodotus, the date of Arctinus, written literature and literary personalities in the 7th century, vase-paintings with epic subjects), though it is relevant that most of these tend to point to the late 9th or the 8th century B.C. It is concerned rather with the criteria for dating different phenomena within the poems.

2. Homeric critics often have to deal with relative dates, not absolute ones. Unfortunately they frequently do not say, and sometimes they do not know, what kind of dates they think they *are* dealing with; and when they clearly mean relative dates they often do not say relative to what—for example to other comparable phenomena, to some particular absolute date, or to the whole chronological span of the epic tradition.

3. One kind of relative dating is implied by the analysis of plot or structure, which might lead to the conclusion, for instance, that the Iliad reproduces certain features of an earlier Memnonis, or the Odyssey of an earlier vengeance-poem. Yet I am not here concerned with structural analysis, still less with the attempted reconstruction of prototypes, because all such attempts are more than usually subjective and open to dispute. Nevertheless this kind of analysis is sometimes useful, not least because it can disclose major inconsistencies which confirm that the monumental poems incorporate traditional themes and episodes as well as traditional language. If structural analysis is combined with a proper use of the objective dating criteria it can lead to some valid conclusions about composition.

4. The two main objective criteria for dating phenomena in the Homeric poems are, first, content and subject-matter, which can be compared with known objects and practices dateable on archaeological grounds; and, secondly, language. The correct assessment of these is the subject of this paper.

5. An obvious warning must be given: the occurrence in traditional poetry of an archaism, whether material or linguistic, does not entail a correspondingly archaic origin for the immediate context. If the archaism is embodied in a repeated and unvaried fixed phrase, then the phrase is probably old in the sense that it belongs to a relatively early stage in the tradition; but it need not be older than other formulas of equal fixity. Thus an archaic word or thing might have survived from its time of origin until its crystallization in the extant poetical formula in many different ways: for example through casual reminiscence or formal prose story-telling, through physical survival as a souvenir or heirloom, or through sur-

vival in different and possibly non-dactylic or non-hexameter poetical contexts. Innovations on the other hand, neologisms and objects or customs assignable to the later part of the life-span of oral poetry, do provide a *terminus post quem*, though here there is the difficulty, usually ignored, that the earliest known occurrence is not necessarily or commonly the earliest actual occurrence.

6. Let us consider the archaeological or subject-matter criterion first. My general thesis will be that our accepted objective criteria tell us much less, and with less certainty, than is normally assumed. This is certainly so of archaeological criteria.

7. For the most part we can only hope to associate phenomena in Homer with rather broad cultural periods: with Mycenaean and Submycenaean, with Proto-geometric and Geometric, and finally with the post-Geometric orientalizing period of the 7th century B.C., which I assume to be post-Homeric in the sense of being certainly later than the main monumental composition of the Iliad, and probably later than that of the Odyssey.

8. It seems hard to deny that cultural features known from late-Mycenaean archaeological contexts, if these features were practical and non-luxurious, like the plan of houses, could have survived more or less unchanged, especially in the refugee areas, for a century or so after the final collapse of the Mycenaean world. Knowledge of such phenomena could then have been carried to the earliest Aeolic and Ionic foundations in Asia Minor, perhaps around 1050 to 1000 B.C., and have been incorporated in poetry either there or back on the mainland. I do not say that this is what did happen, but that it could have happened. In other words the mention in the Iliad or Odyssey of apparently late-Mycenaean objects is not by itself a necessary proof of Mycenaean poetry. A similar reserve will be manifested towards Mycenaean *words* in Homer (§ 19).

9. Of course there are Mycenaean things and ideas in the Iliad and Odyssey. Yet not all or most of these need have entered a *poetical* tradition during the Mycenaean age itself. Their memory could have survived in less formal ways into the Submycenaean and early Protogeometric period, especially in places like Attica, Arcadia and Achaea. The more complex and less tangible the Mycenaean information in Homer the greater its claim to have survived by means of formal and exactly memorable, and therefore probably poetical, narration. Thus boar's-tusk helmets could conceivably have survived physically until, say, the late 11th century B.C., to have been described then by an archaizing poet—though this is not particularly probable; even body-shields, apparently obsolete even in the last two centuries of Mycenae, could conceivably have survived in pictures or in martial memory or by a combination of the two; the many myths which Nilsson showed in "The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology" to have had an original Bronze-Age setting could have been passed down in unversified narrative; but much of the substance of the Catalogue of Achaean Contingents in the second book of the Iliad, which gives a complex and largely accurate survey of the Mycenaean geography disrupted by the Dorian movement, can hardly have been

compiled more than a generation or so later than the final upheaval and must have been very soon committed to a fixed form, which means poetry.

10. The following is the total list, as it seems to me, of the certainly Mycenaean objects and practices mentioned in Homer. It excludes things like the composite bow, the handgrip-and-baldric shield, or mass chariot tactics, which appear irregularly in Homer and could be either Mycenaean or Geometric in date. It also omits the scale-corslet, perhaps implied in the traditional epithet *χαλκοχίτωνες* and in one or two special passages, as being too uncertain. We are left with: (I) the body-shield, undoubtedly in association with Ajax and once each with Hector and Periphetes, and from the evidence of archaeological finds obsolete even before the Trojan war. (II) The silver-studded sword is known both from the 15th and from the 7th century B.C., but its rigidly formular status in Homer shows that it must belong to a relatively old part of the tradition and thus be Mycenaean (see also § 20). The possibility cannot be excluded, though it may be small, that such swords continued to be made in the late Mycenaean age. (III) The boar's-tusk helmet described in the Doloneia (Il. X 261 ff.) is a common Mycenaean type never yet found in post-Mycenaean contexts. Its clear and detailed description is untypical of the lay of Dolon, and may well be closely based on an earlier traditional account. The object is treated in its context as an oddity and an heirloom; the original which inspired the traditional description could conceivably have survived—contrary to what is often asserted—as an antique, down into post-Mycenaean times. Thousands of 16th-century A.D. chairs, for instance, or more appropriately certain obsolete and useless objects like early tennis-racquets, still survive from hundreds of years ago and have not mouldered into dust. Leather, an important part of the boar's-tusk helmet, survives pretty well. At the same time we may well doubt whether an isolated object is likely to have inspired an oral poet. (IV) Nestor's dove-cup, Il. XI 632 ff., whatever its exact type or relationship to the cup from the fourth Shaft-grave, must be Mycenaean and cannot be envisaged as having been made in any later period. It too could have survived as an heirloom, perhaps more easily than a helmet, though the same caveat applies. (V) The technique of metal inlay, described with some probable contamination in the eighteenth book of the Iliad, is Mycenaean and not later. (VI) The over-all consistency throughout the poems of references to bronze as the material of weapons and cutting-tools is presumably based on Bronze-age practice, experienced or remembered. Yet bronze remained important even in the early Iron Age. Moreover its old status would have been remembered even outside poetry for two or three generations, and its reconstruction, with a few lapses, would not be beyond the capacity of an archaic tradition, even if this began so late as the Submycenaean or early Protogeometric period. (VII) The reference to the wealth and the hundred broad gates of Egyptian Thebes at Il. IX 381-4, one line of which recurs at Od. IV 127, is presumably derived ultimately from Achaean knowledge of Egypt in the great age of Mycenae. In the Iliad

passage, at least, the Egyptian reference is an afterthought; the coupling of Thebes with Orchomenos shows that the Boeotian city was originally meant.—We come finally to the most widely distributed and important evidence for the Mycenaean roots of the legendary tradition, namely (VIII) the Mycenaean geography, particularly of the Achaean Catalogue, and (IX) the whole background of the Trojan war, which did in fact take place in the late Mycenaean period. Miss Gray would also add the plan of the palace of Odysseus (*CQ N.S.* 5 [1955] 7 ff.), but I have already suggested that such information might be deduced from what could still be observed in places like post-Mycenaean Athens. The complex organization of the noble household seen in the *Odyssey* presumably reflects Mycenaean conditions rather than those of a Dark Age, though this is hard to assess; while the almost complete absence of references to the Dorians implies correct archaization and the avoidance of obvious anachronism rather than necessarily pre-Dorian composition. As for the religious ideas identified as Mycenaean by Nilsson, the Homeric references to Athena as protectress or Zeus as king of Olympus can perfectly well be based on the beliefs of the 11th or 10th century B.C., although similar beliefs undoubtedly go back into the Bronze Age.

11. Thus only a small number of specifically Mycenaean objects or practices can be identified with any certainty. These are of the utmost importance; but it is the general Mycenaean colouring of the Homeric poems, seen in the Achaean geography and the whole background of the Trojan war, that chiefly supports an ultimate origin of the oral legendary tradition in the Mycenaean age itself. But whether those origins were poetical, and in particular of dactylic type, is not thereby necessarily demonstrated. The linguistic phenomena provide certain indications, but these are not decisive, as I shall attempt to show in §§ 19–25. Yet it is improbable that the Mycenaean culture was completely devoid of poetry. Work-songs, dirges and dance-songs were presumably known, and it seems reasonable to conjecture that there was some kind of narrative poetry too. This may have been dactylic; for it seems unlikely that the dactylic hexameter, a fully-developed metre in Homer, even in relatively old and obsolete phrases, first originated in the confused conditions of the Dark Age. Yet the possible contribution of this age to Homeric poetry should not be underestimated. Personally I do not believe it to have been so dark as it is often painted, especially in the uninvaded areas. Submycenaean pottery, though in general much inferior to late-Mycenaean or Protogeometric, is very far from being abysmal in quality or symptomatic of complete cultural disintegration. In conditions of disintegration elaborate decoration, which appears on many Submycenaean pots, would be absent. It is salutary to remember the difficulty which experts sometimes have in distinguishing the better examples of it from Protogeometric. Conversely the merits of Protogeometric are often exaggerated, and I am not one of those who liken the *Iliad* to a Protogeometric pot and even argue that it must therefore have been made in Attica.

12. Nevertheless the Dark Age was undeniably a period of acute cultural decline.

I am not at all sure that we can therefore necessarily exclude poetical progress and inventiveness. Those who think that there is a good deal of Mycenaean poetry in Homer have to concede that this was *transmitted* through the Dark Age; and transmission is only divided by a fine line from creation, in an oral heroic tradition. Oral poetry does not need good material conditions, though it presupposes communal life of some kind. The virtual absence of Submycenaean and Protogeometric remains, apart from graves, indicates a large-scale dispersal of population and the disappearance of big urban centres. This does not mean that there were not many village settlements. Further, heroic poetry is something that can be actually encouraged by dispersal and material adversity, caused for example by enemy occupation; there are few other kinds of amusement, and no other means so good for gratifying an inevitable nostalgia for the nobler past. This was certainly the case with the Klephtic songs in Greece, for example, and the heroic poetry of Serbo-Croatia.

13. The Protogeometric and Geometric period lasted from around 1025 to around 700 B.C. The following Homeric subjects may be specifically assigned to it, again with the exclusion of things or practices which could indifferently belong either to this era or to an earlier or later one: (I) cremation as a regular peace-time practice. Seen for example at Perati in Attica even in the 12th century, cremation became common in Athens around 1050 and then spread to the Ionian settlements in Asia Minor, where it was maintained—in Colophon at least—down to 800 B.C. or later. It was very rare in Mycenaean times, except for use in war and overseas—an exception which may be deduced from its universality in the Iliad. The rare assumptions in Homer that cremation is the *normal* means of disposal of the dead, as in Anticleia's speech to Odysseus at Od. XI 216 ff., must be Protogeometric or Geometric in origin. (II) The pair of light throwing-spears, as seen on late-Geometric vases and often assumed as standard armament in the Iliad, was a post-Mycenaean innovation. (The single heavy thrusting-spear, which also makes its appearance in the mixed epic tradition, was used down to the end of the Mycenaean age and re-introduced in the 8th century as part of hoplite armature. References to it are impossible to date with security, unless by the aid of other criteria.) (III) The silver work-basket on wheels which was given to Helen by Alkandre of (Egyptian) Thebes according to Od. IV 131 f. is probably based on a fashion introduced from the Near East around the beginning of the first millennium B.C. The remains of a middle-Geometric bronze wheeled tripod were found by Miss Benton in the Polis Bay cave in Ithaca (BSA 35 [1938] 58 f.). There were no direct contacts between Greece and Egypt at this period, and so the Egyptian association is probably caused by memories of Egyptian luxury in the Mycenaean age (rather than being a reflexion of new relations with Saite Egypt in the 7th century): see also § 10, vii. (IV) The omission of references to scribes and writing, particularly from the peace-time descriptions of the Odyssey, presumably reflects the common conditions of the Dark Age down to the probable time of the introduction of alphabetic writing into Greece in the late 9th or 8th

century. (V) Phoenician ships in Greek waters are mentioned both in the Iliad and in the Odyssey. There is no evidence either in Homer or in archaeology that their penetration was particularly widespread or persistent; it probably began around 900 and must have terminated by the 8th century when Greek trading interests were protected by Greek warships.

14. Of the preceding list only the last three subjects can be further localized, with some probability, within the long period from the 11th to the end of the 8th century B.C. Two other practices occasionally mentioned in Homer could belong in theory either to the Geometric or to the post-Geometric age, but are suggested by their formular expression in the poems to come from the former, when the tradition of oral verse-making was still uncontaminated. They are: (I) the separate temple. This is evidently in the main a post-Mycenaean development; in the Bronze Age it was the practice to worship gods or goddesses in rooms of houses or palaces, or in open-air enclosures. There is one probable exception, a small Mycenaean temple at Delos (Artemision Ac), cf. de Santerre, "Délos Primitive et Archaique" (Paris 1958) 89ff. Otherwise the earliest known separate roofed temples in Greece date probably from the late 9th century B.C., the temple of Hera Akraia at Perachora being the firmest example. Thus the few references to separate temples in Homer—for example of Athene at Troy and Apollo at Pytho—are unlikely by this criterion to be earlier than the 9th century in origin. The reference to Athene visiting her shrine in Erechtheus's house on the Acropolis at Athens (Od. VII 81, cf. Il. II 547ff.) looks back to an earlier period, though not necessarily of course to the Mycenaean period itself. (II) Hoplite tactics. The introduction in Greece of this form of warfare was placed until recently early in the 7th century, but the late-Geometric bronze helmet and cuirass found in 1953 in a grave at Argos (BCH 81 [1957] 322ff.) suggest that this date must be raised to around 720 at latest. It is unlikely that the Argive armour was the first of its kind to be made, and one cannot deny that experiments with bronze-clad troops fighting in close mutual support may have been carried on in Argos or Sparta even before 750. How long the new hoplite tactics took to cross the Aegean, or to make an impression on oral poets, we cannot know; but clear hoplite references in Homer cannot be safely put earlier than about 725—nor can they now be necessarily put down into the post-Homeric period. There are in my opinion three such clear references and three only (Il. XII 105; XIII 130ff.; XVI 212ff.), of which the last is inorganic and the first two contain some odd and perhaps untraditional language. There are many other places in the Iliad where hoplite fighting may be envisaged, but where there is no certainty of this; for neither common terms like *πύροι*, *στίχες* and *φάλαγγες* nor references to the gleam of bronze necessarily refer to hoplites rather than to less organized mass-formations of the common troops. Such passages are therefore not necessarily so late in invention as round 725—indeed their formular quality often suggests that they are considerably earlier.

15. As an example of an ambiguous dating-criterion the four-horse chariot may

be cited. Two-horse chariots are normal in Homer, and four horses are mentioned or implied only three times: Il. VIII 185, XI 699ff., Od. XIII 81ff. There are linguistic reasons for placing at least two of these occurrences relatively late in the oral tradition, and there is no archaeological evidence to suggest that four-horse chariots were used before the late-Geometric period, when they occur for example as plastic groups to form the handles of some pyxides. Equally alien to heroic practice is the mention of horse-back riding in two similes, Il. XV 679ff., Od. V 371 (for there is no such reference intended in the Doloneia, Il. X 513ff., where any confusion is due to other factors). In such cases, however, no *terminus post quem* can be conjectured; warriors on horseback are not unknown on Geometric vases, and Mycenaean terracottas of helmeted riders have been found at Prosymna and Mycenae; see Hood, BSA 48 (1953) 84ff. There can be no doubt that horses were ridden in Greece, though before the end of the Geometric period not frequently in warfare or in formal circumstances, right back into the Bronze Age. Other so-called 'late' practices in Homer, like fishing and the use of trumpets, are similar: they are un-heroic and, save in exceptional conditions, untraditional, and they tend to come in similes; but it cannot be said that they are necessarily late by the archaeological criterion, because men have always fished and had a tendency to bang or blow things in battle. The staining of the horse's ivory cheek-piece by a Maeonian or Carian woman, mentioned in a simile in the Iliad (IV 141ff.), is again untraditional, but whereas this kind of decoration was extremely old in Asia Minor, there may be a reasonable *terminus post* here in the foundation of the Aeolic and Ionic colonies; though earlier Mycenaean settlements at Miletus and elsewhere show that this particular piece of information might conceivably have been acquired at almost any date.

16. To the important question, how many objects or practices in Homer can be securely dated to the post-Geometric 7th century, the answer seems to be 'only one', and that restricted to two dispensable lines athetized by Aristarchus. I find myself persuaded by D. L. Page's argument ("History and the Homeric Iliad" 323), based on Jacoby's 'Patrios Nomos' article in JHS 64 (1944) 37ff., that Nestor's proposal at Il. VII 334f. that the burned bones of the Achaean dead should be collected 'so that each man may bring home the bones for the children, whosoever we return again to our native land' must be an Athenian interpolation, an archaeological Atticism; for the practice is unique in Homer and apparently in the Greek world in general, and corresponds only with an Athenian custom initiated according to Jacoby in 464 B.C. It does not necessarily follow that the context of this couplet, and the building of the Wall, are so late as the couplet itself. Among many objects or practices which have been unjustifiably claimed to entail post-Geometric composition the following deserve mention (I say nothing of ideas such as that of Prayers as healers of Infatuation at Il. IX 502ff., which may be untraditional and similar to what is found in Hesiod but which cannot be objectively dated as between say the 8th and the 7th century B.C.):

(I) Odysseus's brooch with two tubes and a relief of a dog attacking a deer (Od. XIX 226ff.); Miss Lorimer argued that the model was 7th-century Etruscan ("Homer and the Monuments" 511ff.), but Jacobsthal in his authoritative "Greek Pins", p. 141, could find no adequate archaeological parallel and reserved judgement. (II) The gorgon's head mentioned in four Homeric passages, most notably in the description of Agamemnon's shield at Il. XI 36f., cannot be confidently assigned to the 7th century. The terracotta gorgoneia found at Tiryns were probably made very early in that century, and Hampe rightly remarks that gorgon-masks were probably much older ("Frühe griechische Sagenbilder" [Athens 1936] 61ff.). Admittedly the gorgoneion as a common decorative motif belongs to the orientalizing and not to the Geometric period, and the whole description of this armour contains a number of late and untraditional features; but no-one can yet *prove* that it, or the other gorgoneion passages, originated as late as the 7th century. (III) The golden lamp with which Athene lights the way for the removal of the arms at Od. XIX 33f.: the context is confused and perhaps relatively recent, but lamps were used in the Mycenaean period and it is improbable that they ever went completely out of use thereafter, though they were certainly uncommon between ca. 1100 and ca. 700 B.C. In any case Mycenaean examples show that the lamp provides no certain indication of post-Geometric composition: see also R. Pfeiffer, St. It. 27/8 (1956) 426ff. Homer does not mention lamps elsewhere; they are untraditional, then, and might be late on this ground—but that is a different argument, and not necessarily a cogent one. The *untraditional* must be clearly distinguished from the *anti-traditional*: see further under § 31. (IV) The procession to lay a robe on the knees of the seated statue of Athene in her temple at Troy (Il. VI 297ff.) need not be post-Geometric. There was very possibly a seated statue of Athene in her temple at Lindos in the 8th century (Lorimer, op. cit. 443f.), while seated cult-images were by no means unknown in Mycenaean and Submycenaean Cyprus at least: cf. e.g. AJA 62 (1958) pl. 99, and Schaeffer, "Enkomia-Alasia" I 371ff. Processions of people bearing offerings to a cult-image are known from the Ayia Triadha sarcophagus onward.

17. In the sum the archaeological criterion tells us notably less than is usually claimed. No more than a single minor passage can be definitely identified as a post-Homeric addition by this criterion. At the earlier end of the time-scale a few specific Mycenaean objects and practices can be isolated, and the general archaization over late-Mycenaean geography and the Trojan war is seen to be good. A great many details in the poems must have originated in the period between 1050 and 700, and must reflect the conditions of those times; but surprisingly few can be distinguished with complete certainty, and of these only illiteracy, hoplite tactics, separate temples, Phoenician ships, and perhaps the wheeled tripod and four-horse chariots allow much narrowing-down of date within this broad period. The chief lack is of really convincing indications of a Mycenaean, as distinct from a Submycenaean or Protogeometric, poetical tradition on the one hand, and

of post-Homeric additions—which we may suspect in many places—on the other.

18. One may now turn for further illumination to the linguistic criterion. Comparative dialect-geography and other types of comparative deduction allow certain fixed points to be determined, as has been shown with notable success by E. Risch (*Mus. Helv.* 12 [1955] 61 ff.). Forms peculiar to Arcadian and Cypriot in the historical period must have originated when these regions were related, which means before the collapse of the Mycenaean world; contraction of adjacent short vowels must be later than the start of the Ionian migration, since Attic-Ionic and Eastern Ionic contract differently, *eo* into *ov* or *ev* and so on—a conclusion confirmed by the Mycenaean tablets; and the loss of digamma from Ionic must have been later than the completion of the phonetic change from *ā* to *η*, since Attic *κόρη*, for example, presupposes **κόρη* and not **κόρfa*. This change had evidently not terminated by the time the Mada first impinged on the Greeks, probably around 1000 B.C., since the Ionians called them *Mῆδοι*, Medes. For this and other reasons the loss of digamma in Ionic, like the simple vowel-contractions, is probably post-migration. Now such arguments can give a very approximate *terminus post quem* for the composition of minimal Homeric contexts containing, for instance, irreplaceable neglected digammas and un-resolvable -*ov* genitives, and at least such contexts can be identified as probably later in invention than about 1050 B.C. This does allow some check on presumed 'Mycenaean' survivals; but linguistic forms which must have originated either before or after the normally assumed limits of the Ionian epic tradition are of more direct significance for our purposes.

19. The Mycenaean words in Homer have recently been the object of much critical attention. The partial decipherment of the Linear B syllabary has indicated that some words in Homer were used in the Mycenaean period, but the uncertainty of decipherment at any particular point, and especially in the determination of many morphological characteristics, severely reduces its usefulness here. The Arcado-Cypriot forms determinable either from inscriptions or from the later grammarians are more helpful, but extreme care is needed over the conclusions to be drawn from them. Does the presence in Homer of a few dozen words in a form which was used in the late Bronze Age, but which did not survive into spoken Ionic or Aeolic, prove that they entered the poetical tradition in the Bronze Age itself? My answer is that it emphatically does not. It is worth emphasizing the following probability: that the Dorian movement, whatever its character, did not just wipe out the Mycenaean dialect in a moment of time, everywhere except in Arcadia and Cyprus. These areas are remarkable not because Mycenaean speech-forms survived there at all, but because they survived there for long enough to be recorded in inscriptions and eventually by scholars of the classical and post-classical age. There must have been other places where Mycenaean dialect-forms were used for a century at least after the fall of the palace-states—most notably Athens, where, quite apart from the presumably south-Mycenaean dialect of the indigenous population, the Peloponnesian refugees whose presence is attested by

tradition (and certainly not contradicted by archaeology) must have spoken a dialect similar to that which can be reconstructed from Arcadian and Cypriot. If we are prepared to admit this—and I do not see how it can be reasonably denied—then in theory the Mycenaean forms in Homer could have entered the epic tradition not during the Mycenaean age itself but in the Submycenaean or early Protogeometric period which succeeded it. Therefore the mere fact of Mycenaean-type forms in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* does not prove that there was Mycenaean poetry and that it directly influenced the Ionian epic.

20. It has been asserted that the Mycenaean forms are sometimes used in particular ways which imply an original Mycenaean poetical context. This amounts to saying either that there are actual Mycenaean poetical formulas surviving in the Homeric poems, or at least that a special fixity of a Mycenaean-type word in a certain position in the Homeric line presupposes an original formular restriction to a corresponding position in Mycenaean poetry. To take the first alternative first: there are virtually no formular phrases in Homer which have a strong claim on the ground of language alone to be considered as Mycenaean in origin. If we check the combinations of known or suspected Arcado-Cypriot words we find *αισιμον ἥμαρ* (which might be a secondary invention, a metrically convenient alternative to *μόρσιμον ἥμαρ*), and possibly chance collocations like *οὐ νύ μοι ἀλσα*, where it is far from certain that *νύ* at least is Mycenaean at all in this usage. Phrases like *ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνων* might seem very archaic, and are obviously deep-rooted in the tradition; but although *Ἄναξ* is certainly Mycenaean in origin, its use also survived in other and later dialectal associations and conveys no certitude of Mycenaean origin for the whole phrase. *φάσγανον ἀργυρόνηλον*, on the other hand, is more impressive, since *φάσγανον* and *ἀργυρός* are Mycenaean and occur in the Linear B tablets, while *ἄλος* may conceivably be so and do so. Again ‘silver’ and ‘stud’, if not this word for ‘sword’, survive in other and later dialects; what we are left with, then, as a significant indication of origin, is a Mycenaean word for sword—but this, like other terms for armour, we should expect to survive for a time after the collapse of the great régime. At this point, however, another and non-linguistic factor must be adduced: that silver-studded swords are strongly suggested by the archaeological evidence to be Mycenaean in date and in fact not later than about 1400 (see § 10). It seems quite probable, therefore, that this formula, together perhaps with the commoner alternative *ξίφος ἀργυρόνηλον*, is of Mycenaean origin. This is important, for a single known Mycenaean poetical phrase in Homer guarantees the existence of Mycenaean dactylic poetry, probably of a narrative kind. Yet the small effect of such poetry on the later tradition is suggested by the fact that other similar examples are conspicuous by their absence. Even here the degree of certainty is far from total; and granted that the description of the silver-studded sword is Mycenaean its dactylic character could be fortuitous; for the words that compose it happen themselves to be dactylic and their combination is bound to fit conveniently into a Homeric hexameter.

21. The case for a significantly formular use of *single* Arcado-Cypriot words in Homer has been put by C. J. Ruijgh in his "L'Élément Achéen dans la Langue Epique" (Assen 1957). But Ruijgh exaggerates both the abnormality and the significance of Mycenaean words in Homer. Thus he thinks that *ῆμαρ* (representing Cypriot, Arcadian and Mycenaean *ἄμαρ*) is unusually formular in usage because out of 82 Homeric occurrences it counts as two long syllables—that is, its last syllable is lengthened by position—only 3 times. In fact there is nothing particularly surprising or even unusual in this: *ῆτορ*, its exact metrical equivalent, does not have its final short syllable lengthened in a single one of its 92 occurrences; or, to take words common in later dialects too, *ὕπνος*, *-ον* avoids lengthening in all except 2 of its 67 occurrences, *ῶμος*, *-ον* in all except one of its 30 occurrences. Does this then suggest that they are derived straight from Mycenaean poetry? Of course not. The matter is far more complex, in fact, than Ruijgh thinks. There is considerable divergence; thus *ἄλλος* *-ον* is lengthened by position in about every fifth occurrence—a relatively high proportion. The preponderance of a particular formula can be a potent factor: thus in 40 out of its 82 occurrences *ῆμαρ* comes in an epithet-noun formula at the line-end, where lengthening is out of the question. This may affect its use in other places in the line, just as the common phrases *ἄλκιμον* *ῆτορ* and *φίλον* *ῆτορ* at the line-end set the pattern for the use of *ῆτορ* in other positions. Undoubtedly such tendencies, like the common formulas which help to sharpen them, go back a very long way in the tradition. Nothing in the facts considered so far suggests that they necessarily go back to the Mycenaean period itself.

22. Ruijgh also thinks it significant that *δῶμα*, for example, a probable Mycenaean form, occurs predominantly before the trochaic caesura or as last word in the line; but the localization of *κῦμα* and many other similar words is not significantly different. Ruijgh cites but does not seem to have digested the article by E. O'Neill Jr. on metrical word-types in the Greek hexameter (Yale Classical Studies 8 [1942] 103 ff.). The fixed localization of the different metrical word-types in Homer is often remarkable; but it is only extremely rarely, if at all, that the probable Mycenaean forms are more remarkable than others. The reasons for such fixity of position can often be divined, and are always related to the structure of the hexameter line and the four places where word-end is felt to be necessary or desirable. This takes us back to the early history of the hexameter, about which nothing is known. It would be foolish to deny that this may have had a Mycenaean stage; but Ruijgh's arguments do not prove that it did or even materially strengthen the probability.

23. Ruijgh's disregard of metrical function unfortunately invalidates his deductions from the three words by which he claims to prove that Arcado-Cypriot forms came into Homer out of Mycenaean poetry. These are the particles *αὐτάρ*, *ἰδέ* and *νν*, whose localization, because of their insignificance, must (he thinks) be meaningful. The most interesting of these is certainly *ἰδέ*, which in 32 of its 34

occurrences in Homer immediately follows the trochaic caesura, so that its final short vowel has almost invariably to be lengthened by position. Now I do not claim that all words of the same metrical type as *ἰδέ*, words of two short syllables and beginning and ending with a vowel, are so strictly localized in this position. The restriction of *ἰδέ* is accentuated by a different and highly suggestive factor, that none of the other available connecting particles—namely *τε*, *καί* and *ἡδέ*—all of which occur in Ionic, could immediately follow the extremely common trochaic caesura. Yet this is a position where a connecting particle was not infrequently needed. Thus the old Mycenaean word seems to have been borrowed and preserved by the *aoidoi* for the performance of this function and virtually of this one only. The other particles made it inessential to use it in other parts of the line, though admittedly *ἰδ'* could on occasions have been helpful elsewhere. The fixity of position of *ἰδέ*, therefore, revealing as it seemed to Ruijgh, is not necessarily or even probably caused by its having entered the post-Mycenaean poetical tradition with a line-position label attached to it, as it were, derived from Mycenaean poetical usage.

24. Recently a more serious case has been made for the survival into Homer of phrases from Mycenaean dactylic epic. This appears in D. L. Page's important book "History and the Homeric Iliad" (Berkeley 1959). In chapter IV Page argues that the Achaean Catalogue in Book II of the Iliad contains much material from the time of the Trojan war itself, or from shortly afterwards. That much of the content is Mycenaean is proved by the geographical situation, as I fully accept. That some of the phraseology is Mycenaean is possible but much less certain. Page argues chiefly from the uncommon and specific nature of many of the place-name epithets—like for example *πολυστάφνλον Ἀρνην*, II 507—which must, he thinks, record a direct experience of places some of which did not even survive the Mycenaean collapse. The untraditional character of these epithets is indeed striking, and Page has performed a valuable service in emphasizing it. Yet the possible element of fiction or arbitrary invention is perhaps greater than he would allow, as I try to show in a forthcoming review in CR, and the possibility cannot be excluded that these epithets were in the main contributed by a post-Mycenaean poet working, for example, within a local tradition of catalogue-poetry outside the main stream of oral narrative. In his sixth chapter Page adduces a somewhat similar argument based primarily on special epithets for Homeric heroes or nationalities. *κορνθαίολος*, for example, meaning 'with gleaming helmet', is almost exclusive to Hector even though there are metrically equivalent Achaean names, like that of Ajax, to which by the normal principles of formulaic usage the epithet might be expected to be attached. Page implies that the epithet is particularly associated with Hector because a historical Trojan called Hector was known for his bronze helmet, still a great rarity at the time of the Trojan war; and therefore that the noun-epithet formula derives from approximately the period of the Trojan war itself. Analogous conclusions are drawn from the epithets for

Troy, the horse-rearing Trojans, and the Achaeans. Cumulatively, and as presented by Page, this type of argument has considerable weight. Yet it can easily be applied too rigidly, as when the formula *ᾶναξ ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνον*, with its Mycenaean term *Fáraξ* and its suggestion of an extent of authority unparalleled after the fall of Mycenae, is taken to be certainly Mycenaean in origin. In fact, relatively old as this phrase indubitably is, it could easily have been formulated some time after the collapse of the Mycenaean world, in a retrospective society in which some of the old words and the old achievements were still remembered. Page minimizes the possible contribution of the Dark Age to heroic poetry because of the decline in material culture (cf. e.g. pp. 118f. of his book), with the result that pre-Ionian phenomena in Homer tend to be pushed back very largely into the Mycenaean period itself. It would be perverse to deny that this period contributed much, especially in subject-matter, to the Ionian epic tradition; but whether it contributed ready-made dactylic phrases in the numbers envisaged by Page is something about which we cannot yet be nearly certain.

25. Thus I cannot accept it as beyond doubt that the reservoir of epic language was fed directly from Mycenaean poetry, or, if it was, that this contribution was a substantial one; although it was undeniably supplemented by certain useful Mycenaean words which might almost equally well have been adopted by singers in the Submycenaean or early Protogeometric periods. Yet in spite of the absence of assured Mycenaean formulas or usages the possibility still remains that the Greek poetical tradition reached back to Mycenaean times. Taking this possibility together with the knowledge preserved in the Homeric poems of Mycenaean objects, geography, mythology, and customs, and adding the argument that even if all these could be supplied in the early post-Mycenaean period it is unlikely that the idea of narrative poetry, and the hexameter itself, were invented then, we may feel inclined to accept Mycenaean narrative poetry of some kind as a probability. Let us not at present regard it as more, or over-estimate its probable impact on the Homeric tradition.

26. To turn now from early to late language in the Iliad and Odyssey: certain philologists are constantly writing about 'recent' and 'late' forms in Homer, and it might reasonably be asked what these forms imply. Do they possess an absolute date of invention or poetical application? Do these philologists mean 'recent' in relation to the whole span of the living oral tradition—not later, then, than the 8th century or the very early 7th? Or do they mean that these forms have been added to, or inserted in, the Homeric poems after the main monumental stage of composition was completed, so that they are of 7th or even 6th century origin? The truth seems to be that some critics have never asked themselves these questions at all, at least in any explicit form. This assumption they all seem to share: that these forms are linguistically more developed than those which are 'normal', meaning 'most common', in the language of the Homeric poems as a whole. But since this 'normal' language is a traditional language, and must have

established itself as a standard long before 'Homer' or the date of monumental composition, then 'recent' forms in this sense might still be no later than the 8th or even the 9th century B.C. in origin.

27. It is patent, however, that philologists often think that 'recent' or 'late' forms, as described by them, must be post-Homeric—7th or 6th century in fact. Yet the truth is (as Mr Colin Hardie observed in *Greece and Rome* N.S. 3 [1956] 123) that there are no objective linguistic criteria whatever for determining whether a relatively late element in the Homeric language is to be dated around 800 B.C. or around 650. It seems to me that all linguistic experts should make this plain, and should also take pains to clarify what they mean on each occasion by terms such as 'early', 'recent' and 'late'.

28. It is nevertheless possible, despite the paucity of absolute dates in the post-migration development of phonetics, morphology, and syntax, to apply two more general types of argument which will tend to establish certain linguistic phenomena in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as either roughly contemporary with the monumental composer of the *Iliad*—and I assume that the *Odyssey* reached something like its present form not much more than a generation later—or as post-Homeric in the sense of being later than the main stage of composition of either poem.

29. My first argument is extremely simple, and it takes as its starting-point G. P. Shipp's "Studies in the Language of Homer" (Cambridge 1953). Shipp finds that in the *Iliad*—and the situation in the *Odyssey* would not be too different—a significantly high proportion of forms classed as 'late' by Chantraine in his "*Grammaire Homérique*" come in the developed similes, and to a lesser extent in other types of digression or material outside the main narrative. Shipp simply marshals the facts, which so far as the similes are concerned seem irrefutable, without drawing conclusions about the composition of the poems. But it nevertheless appears that he frequently takes 'late' to imply 'post-Homeric'—that is, to describe forms added to the *Iliad* after the main process of monumental composition was completed. Chantraine certainly assumed that this was Shipp's meaning, and incidentally revealed what he himself often meant when he wrote of a word or form in Homer that it is 'récent'; for in his review of Shipp (*Rév. de Philologie* 29 [1955] 73) he observes as an implied criticism that not all or most of the developed similes could have been post-Homeric additions. With this I absolutely agree, but I draw from it a quite different conclusion: not that there cannot have been an exceptionally high proportion of relatively late forms in the similes, or that if there was then this is surprising and inexplicable, but that *since most of the similes are highly unlikely to be post-Homeric then the forms which they contain, including the so-called 'late' forms, are not post-Homeric either*. In other words I am prepared to assume on other than linguistic grounds that the developed similes were not tacked on after the monumental poem had come into being, but were integrated into the monumental structure by the composer himself. *A priori* suppositions about Homer should admittedly be avoided as far as possible; but

here, I would submit, is a case where most critics would agree. Most of these similes, or at least many of them, fulfil an essential structural purpose, in terms of dramatic tension or relaxation, in their specific context; it would be unjustified to invoke in addition their high literary quality in itself, but at least the clarity and simplicity of their expression, except in the case of a few obviously added or expanded examples, are not what we might consistently expect from added elaborations, either on general grounds or in the light of the considerations adduced in §§ 31–4. Whether or not the developed simile was the special discovery of Homer and his contemporaries is another question, and one which is only indirectly relevant to the present argument about the absolute *terminus ante quem* of the relatively late forms distinguished by Chantraine, Shipp and others.

30. If we accept this argument then we must conclude that a large proportion of the forms called 'late' by Chantraine and others are no later than Homer the poet of the monumental Iliad, whom there are external objective reasons for placing not later than the 8th century B.C. Thus the occurrence in a particular passage of the kind of linguistic form which philologists tend to class as late, except in the case of organic Atticisms, is no reason in itself for regarding the passage as a post-Homeric addition. It might, on the contrary, be a reason for regarding it as the work of the monumental composer himself.

31. If neither the strict philological criterion nor the archaeological criterion can distinguish indubitable post-Homeric characteristics of the poems, except in the case of the organic Atticisms, is there no satisfactory way of identifying probable post-Homeric additions and elaborations? Do we have to fall back entirely on structural analysis, so dangerous when unsupported by more objective criteria? I think not, and adduce my second general argument. This is in fact 'nothing new, but what we are always talking about': the analysis of formular phraseology in the Parry manner, though not in a direction which he stressed. For the examination of the form of single words does not allow the distinction of Homeric from post-Homeric, except in the case of Atticisms, because of the absence of absolute dates in the development of poetical Greek from the Ionian migration to the earliest written literature. Yet the examination of words *in the phrase* can be related to a distinction between living oral composition and what may be crudely termed post-oral composition, the transition between these being absolutely dateable, with some considerable probability, to between 700 and 650 (or possibly 600) B.C. Thus I would distinguish sharply not so much between traditional and untraditional phraseology, since the latter may merely imply oral innovation, or a local deviation of some kind; but between traditional and anti-traditional—a term used by D. L. Page in "History and the Homeric Iliad"—the latter of which implies not merely innovation but the definite misunderstanding or maltreatment of traditional language. The same distinction may be applied *mutatis mutandis*, and much less profitably, to objects and practices in the poems.

32. I conclude as a general rule that anti-traditional phraseology is almost

always post-Homeric, because it was only possible to misuse the tradition and ignore the canons of the inherited technique of oral verse-making when those canons were no longer completely and actively valid, since the whole art of oral improvisation was decaying before the new practice of written verse and the new interest in a more personal kind of poetry. This is merely a general and incomplete formulation of a point of view which must be held consciously or unconsciously by many critics. Thus I agree with those who think that the poet who conceived of Zeus sending lightning to make not only rain, hail or snow but also 'in some place the great mouth of piercing war', *ἡέ ποθι πτολέμοιο μέγα στόμα πενκεδανοῖο* (Il. X 8), cannot have been conversant with the range of alternatives proper to a Homeric simile, or even with the 'mouth of war' metaphor. His line, to put it bluntly, is clumsy and inept. Nor can the poet who at Il. XVII 476 used the phrase 'of immortal horses to contain the subduing and the might', *ἴππων ἀθανάτων ἔχέμεν δμῆσιν τε μένος τε*, have been properly familiar with the traditional resources for linking traditional word-groups like *ἴππων ἀθανάτων* on the one hand and *μένος τε* at the line-end on the other; or rather his attempt at innovation and improvement shows that he was free, too free, of the inherited restrictions of the natural oral poet. Nor do I think that the authors of the sentences 'among them they (sc. the gods) broke heavy strife', *ἐν δ' αὐτοῖς ἔριδα δήγυνντο βαρεῖαν* (Il. XX 55), or 'along his nostrils already keen might struck forward', *ἀνὰ φῖνας δέ οἱ ἥδη / δριμὺ μένος προύτνυε* (Od. XXIV 318f.), were true *ἀοιδοί*, creative oral poets; because they have taken the traditional formulaic vocabulary and made out of it not the usual smooth and unforced expression of any required idea (even a new one, provided that it does not outstrip the conceptual range of the heroic poet), but something which is not only unparalleled in the Homeric language but also positively alien to it, which is strained, bizarre, and indeed almost meaningless. These are only a few extreme examples of the distortion of the traditional language of formulas. Many more can be found, though needless to say great circumspection is required for this kind of criticism. They are to be found sometimes in those sections of the poems which may be suspected on other grounds, also, of being post-Homeric elaborations—in the Doloneia and parts of the Diomedea, for example, in the Iliad, and in the Nekyia and the last book in the Odyssey; but sometimes they may be found sporadically in apparently more traditional parts of the poems.

33. It is true, of course, that very archaic elements in the oral poetical tradition were occasionally misunderstood even when that tradition was itself still flourishing. Such are many of the examples collected by Leumann in "Homerische Wörter", or rather I should say a high proportion of the small number of his examples that seems on close inspection to be really convincing. Such misunderstandings were usually of uncommon and obsolete words in potentially ambiguous traditional contexts, and they can be clearly distinguished from cases of the misuse of well-established, frequent and perfectly intelligible traditional phraseology.

34. Such additions and distortions must have been made for the most part by

men who were closer to being rhapsodes than to being aoidoi, who were professional reciters of a fixed repertoire of famous poetry rather than minstrels who were able to improvise their own versions. There will be disagreement over particular instances, but I submit that the principle is correct: that anti-traditional language usually implies post-traditional composition. The composers of the Iliad and the Odyssey came near the end of the living oral tradition, indeed they probably unconsciously hastened its decline by producing poems great enough in quality and quantity to provide a livelihood for the mere declaimer. Such a criterion is of course a poor substitute for an absolute linguistic dating-criterion since it lacks precision and depends on a number of unprovable assumptions. Until new linguistic evidence turns up which provides fixed points for the development of Greek between 1050 and 650 B.C. it must serve as the best there is. Some will object that it approaches perilously near to being that dangerous object, a stylistic criterion, and this is in a way true. Yet W. H. Friedrich's study of the phraseology of wounds and death in the Iliad, for example ("Verwundung und Tod in der Ilias", Göttingen 1956), shows that the examination of style is in certain conditions very profitable. He undoubtedly succeeds in illustrating that passion for dramatic variation and elaboration at almost any price which I consider characteristic of many rhapsodic contributions to the text of Homer.

35. To recapitulate: the two objective criteria for dating elements within the Homeric poems, namely archaeology and language, require careful handling and reveal less than is generally claimed for them. They enable certain elements to be recognized as having existed as early as the late Bronze Age, but do not necessarily prove that these all passed into the Ionian epic tradition by the medium of late Bronze Age poetry. The formular quality of detectable Mycenaean words in Homer requires further study, but seems to be nothing unusual; it shows that they belong relatively early in the epic tradition, not that this tradition is directly Mycenaean in origin—since certain Mycenaean cultural and linguistic information must still have been available, not necessarily in poetical form, in the early post-Mycenaean period, the Dark Age in fact. As for relatively recent elements in the Iliad and Odyssey, archaeology suggests a few specific *terminos post* but can identify virtually nothing as certainly post-Geometric. Philology can do little better, except in the case of the few organic Atticisms, since the frequent occurrence of many so-called 'late' forms in the developed similes strongly suggests that these forms can be no later than the composer of the monumental Iliad. Additions to the poems, then, can in general only be plausibly identified where the mutilation of established formulas implies the decline of a true oral tradition¹.

¹ This paper has benefitted from discussion by members of the Oxford Philological Society, to whom it was originally delivered; and later from the detailed comments of Professor D. L. Page and Mr V. R. Desborough, to whom I record my gratitude. Of course these scholars do not necessarily agree with all that I have written; Professor Page, for example, assesses the probable contributions of the late Mycenaean period and the Dark Age somewhat differently from myself, and in this he may well be right.