

## *Preface*

Authority texts, whether ancient or modern, from law codes to credos, tend to grow to adjust to new conditions. This is as true of the Homeric poems as of the Confucian Analects, or Isaiah, or the Mahâbhârata. The very excellence of the Homeric poems suggests that they rest on earlier tradition. It has been the aim of scholars since Wolf, whose *Prolegomena* appeared in 1795, to try to discern, in the texts we have, the way in which they came to be what they are. A recent preference, in all fields of humanistic inquiry, to consider only the texts we now have, has put those efforts on hold. We here return to them.

Of those efforts there have been many, from suggestions about particular passages to complete reconstructions of an original *Iliad*. Some see the *Iliad* as the result of a single creative act, but such things are not done in a vacuum, and the text itself implies an experienced tradition, with its established conventions. We think it more realistic to regard Homer's *Menis* as the end of a process, not only enjoying the advantage of an established medium, but possibly making use of some earlier compositions in that established medium. From that perspective, the *Menis*, the achievement that is plausibly attributed to "Homer," is not a tale, but in part a reshaping of an old repertoire of tales around a new narrative, where the failures of many warriors become a backdrop for the success of one: the victory of the single warrior Achilles. The Trojan War in miniature.

The "Menis" in turn attracted later improvements, or anyway, additions; the story of Dolon is widely recognized as one of them. We use the name "Menis" for Homer's work as he himself left it, and retain the traditional name "Iliad" for the thing we now read, which includes those later additions.

Then there is the *Odyssey*, a composition in a very different vein, with its sometimes wry take on the earlier poem: its gentle corrections, its reminders of what war, whether against Hector, or Troy, or any other enemy, is all about. And of what lies beyond the power of war to achieve.

We have in mind two readerships: those well versed in Homeric problems, and those who last looked at Homer in school. Our proposal, though including some old ideas, will be effectively new to both. We here write as for the latter, being confident that the former, if they care to, will easily find their way.

We do not give a reconstruction, or address all the problems that would be preliminary to a reconstruction. We do try to suggest what a reconstruction might look like, and how one stage in the long growth process led to another. We hope to provide a more musically aware and stylistically sensitive reading, the better to suggest what the texts were up to in their own time.

These poems were authority texts, even identity texts, for ancient Greece. They do not have that function today. But like many treasures from the past, they remain part of our common heritage. They are worth our attention, simply as part of what the world has been, and of what, in some ways, it still is.

Conventions observed in this book include the following:

- Dates in the main argument are “BC,” and need not be specified as such.
- To “II” (so like a Roman “II”) and “Od,” we prefer “Id” and “Od.”
- The full forms of works cited by short form in the text are given, not at the end of each chapter, but in the Works Cited list at the end of the book.
- We use Bolling’s *Ilias Atheniensium* for passages doubted at Alexandria.
- Our translations are adapted from the line-by-line versions of Smith and Miller (1944) for the *Iliad*, and that of Cotterill (1911) for the *Odyssey*.
- Those following in Lattimore’s *Iliad* should renumber lines at two places: (1) *Iliad* 11:543 should be 544, and so on to the end; the last line is 11:848. (2) 189:604 is really two lines; number as 604-605; the last line is 18:617.
- With Lattimore, we sometimes depart from rigor in the spelling of Greek names: Athena (vs Athene), Calypso (vs Kalypso), Achilles (vs Achilleus).
- Out of consideration for readers new to Homer, our citations are mostly from works available in English.
- The vituperation characteristic of much Homeric discourse is a disgrace to that or any other field; it is the argument of those who have no argument. Save for this one sentence, we will take no notice of it.
- We make no apology for the parallels from other traditions. Literary and musical expression have many differences, but also many commonalities. Here as elsewhere, the more we know, the more we can hope to recognize.

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We thank various friends for their criticisms, which have helped us much. We must especially mention the other members of the online *Homerica* group: Al Cohen, Dennis Grafflin, Larissa Kennedy, and Haun Saussy. We are grateful also to the scholars of the past: the light they have shed on both sides of the many Homeric problems has done much to clarify just what the problems are. For our own choices among the possible solutions, we are solely responsible.

Our debts go back to antiquity itself: to Zenodotus and the Alexandrians, who challenged some lines of both poems, and to Aristarchus, who produced the standard text which, in its Wolfian form, is what we now have.

We return at the end to Wolf himself, whose *Prolegomena* inaugurated the modern study of Homer, and whose demand to study philology at Göttingen, at a time when that subject did not even officially exist there, helped to establish the modern form of the ancient tradition in which we ourselves work. It is to Friedrich August Wolf that this book is dedicated.

May our readers find these present studies to be of interest, and assistance, in approaching the always challenging and rewarding Homeric poems.

E Bruce Brooks  
Keith L Yoder

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