HOMER AND THE EPIC

A SHORTENED VERSION OF
‘THE SONGS OF HOMER’

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CONTENTS

Preface \hspace{100pt} page vii

PART I. THE ORAL EPIC

1 The Homeric poems are oral  \hspace{65pt} 1
   1. Heroic Age and oral poetry; 2. The language of formulas in Homer; 3. The oral tradition and literacy; 4. Composition by theme; 5. Directness and originality in formular poetry

2 Homer and modern oral poetry \hspace{65pt} 19
   1. The oral epic in Yugoslavia; 2. The life-cycle of an oral tradition; 3. Oral dictated texts

PART II. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3 The rise of Mycenae \hspace{65pt} 33

4 Life in a Late Bronze Age palace-state \hspace{65pt} 45

5 From the Achaeian decline to the time of Homer \hspace{65pt} 54

PART III. THE PREHISTORY OF THE HOMERIC TRADITION

6 Poetical possibilities of the Dark Age \hspace{65pt} 63

7 Was there Achaean epic poetry? \hspace{65pt} 70

8 Dark Age elements and Aeolic elements \hspace{65pt} 82

PART IV. THE ILIAD AND ODYSSEY AS MONUMENTAL POEMS

9 Some basic qualities \hspace{65pt} 91

10 The Iliad \hspace{65pt} 101

11 The Odyssey
PART V. THE STYLE, LANGUAGE AND MATERIAL BACKGROUND OF THE ILIAD AND ODYSSEY

12 Subjects and styles page 126
13 The criterion of language 138
14 Differences of material culture 149

PART VI. DIVERSITY AND UNITY IN THE LARGE-SCALE PLOT

15 Structural difficulties in the Iliad 157
16 Structural difficulties in the Odyssey 167
17 Unity, real and imaginary 180

PART VII. HOW THE POEMS DEVELOPED

18 The circumstances of monumental composition 190
19 Two crucial phases of transmission 208
20 The process of development 217

References 229
Index 239
PREFACE

This version of The Songs of Homer has been made to meet the publishers’ feeling that a paperback edition is worthwhile, but has for various reasons to be shorter. What began as an expedient has turned out to have real advantages, since I believe that for some classes of reader the new version represents a genuine improvement. For a more complete and detailed account The Songs of Homer must still be used; yet most of its essential attitudes and arguments are reproduced in Homer and the Epic. The scale has been reduced by about two-fifths, in detail rather than by the omission of whole sections. The pages dealing with the historical background, the possibility of Achaean and Aeolic epic, and the more technical aspects of the language, have been abbreviated most; and those dealing with oral poetry (which now come first) and the Iliad and Odyssey as literature (which have been moved to the centre of the book) least of all. The original six parts have become seven, the original eighteen chapters have become twenty. With shorter and simpler chapters and the reduction of the more technical discussions the new version should be more easily within the reach of students who are primarily interested in Classics in translation, Comparative Literature, Oral Poetry, or the Epic in general. It has been necessary to keep some Greek, especially in the short but crucial discussions of the Homeric language, but a close translation is practically always attached.

My original intention is unchanged: to develop a comprehensive and unified view of the nature of the Iliad and Odyssey, of their relation to the oral heroic poetry of the Greek Dark Age and beyond, and of their creation as monumental poems by two great singers in the 8th century B.C. No one who writes on Homer (as I said in the earlier Preface) can either expect or deserve common assent; yet at certain points I may hope at least to have clarified the issues, at others to have introduced a kind of salutary agnosticism.
Some changes and corrections have been made, and two or three passages rewritten, in the light of further reflection, fresh discovery, or published reviews of the longer book. The number of Plates has been halved in the interest of cost, and the notes have been still further simplified. Finally I must mention again the debts I owe to others: especially to J. Chadwick, M. I. Finley and above all D. L. Page.

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The plates have been omitted from the 1974 printing.

NOTE

Superior figures in the text indicate an entry in the References, which begin on p. 229