

Introduction p. x Homer has been rejected as evidence, with a pang. He is every Mycenaean scholar's passion. All the other great ancient cultures have their quotable, instructive contemporary literature - Sumerians, Akkadians, Hittites, Canaanites, Egyptians, nearly everyone but the Minoans. From such texts in law, cult, folk-tale, and historical narrative a far sounder, more lively reconstruction of civilization can be made than for the Mycenaeans unfairly deprived of Homer. The danger comes when Homer gets more quoted for the Mycenaean world he never knew than historically contemporary texts for other cultures. Scarcely anyone can approach a Bronze Age tub without thinking of Telemachos' pleasant bath at Pylos, or a complex megaron system without seeing Odysseus hiding the suitors' weapons in the glow of Athena's lamp. This classical habit is so ingrained, it colors our view of hearths and food, chariots and rafts, embroidered robes and helmets, drinking cups and vineyards, besieged island cities and the gates of Troy. We say in justification that large parts of the poems incorporate Mycenaean traditions, that the five hundred years separating the fall of Troy VII A from the Homeric version of its fall have wrought only minor innovations, a few misunderstandings of the past and adaptations to more modern experience. We hope that the core of those great poems has not been terribly changed by successive improvisations of oral poets - surely poets will guard for us the heritage of the past. We are tempted to use whatever corresponds to our excavated knowledge or imagined re-creations; led ever backward, Homer is found apt for times as remote as the Shaft Graves, nearly a thousand years before the text we have. But if one thing is more certain than another in dealing with Greece, it is that every generation, let alone century or millennium, saw changes more profound than the simple classicist sometimes likes to acknowledge. It seems more honest, even refreshing, not to invoke Homer either as decoration or instruction.

p. 135 One of the most exciting discoveries at Dendra has international implications of a different sort. In 1960 a tomb known to the Antiquities Service for several years was broken into by robbers . . . This chamber tomb (No.13) was then excavated properly by Verdelis and Åström, and was found to contain a single male burial, a warrior wearing a complete bronze cuirass, surrounded by other military gear . . . , already famous with good reason: it is the only such armor known from Greece before the Dark Ages and was buried about the time of the fall of Knossos. Many details of its construction agree with formulas in Homeric poetry which used to be thought of as post-Mycenaean innovations. It is made in two pieces, a front and back shell which fasten on the side with twisted thongs. Below the hips, like a skirt, come three flexible bands of bronze front and back with attachment holes in the lowest front band to adjust its height and give the soldier's thighs greater freedom as he ran. . . A pair of bronze greaves guarded the shins. Another, later pair of greaves also in bronze was already known from a tomb in Achaia . . . to confirm Homer's account of "bronze-clad Achaians" as the core of Mycenaean fighting strength; the Dendra greaves will persuade reluctant scholars that at least some Homeric material reaches back to early stages of Mycenaean culture.

Verdelis pointed out the contrast between this suit of armor and the ideograms for cuirass on the Pylos tablets of the thirteenth century: the real thing seems more archaic than the sketch. Marinatos went farther and established its likeness to ideograms on the Knossos tablets of recently disputed date . . . At Knossos, cuirasses are issued to special Greek troops along with ((p.136)) a helmet, a chariot, and a pair of horses; those of the Dendra type are called qe-ro₂ (ancestor of the Homeric γύαλα) and have a qe written across the stomach. Although Homer knew it as a very archaic, inherited suit of armor, a nasty question arises as to whether the Knossos tablets could possibly be as late as the Pylos ones if the armor was current two centuries earlier. One can fight in an inherited suit for a generation or two; after two hundred years even a well-oiled heirloom tends to get rusty.