

p. 311 What shall we grant Homer as "pure" Mycenaean? Epithets and myths of towns which faded out after 1200 B.C. - Pylos, Salamis, Dendra, Thebes, and Troy. Some of their visual charms painted by the epithets were meters under dust or overgrown with scrub when Homer was born, and their myths half-forgotten. Homer, like every good oral poet, guarded these by communal oral memory and reintroduced the Greeks to aspects of their own past which non-poets did not know of. Certain set pieces were preserved such as catalogues of ships, men, and treasures. The originals of many myths retold by Homer were Mycenaean since they refer to people and towns of the Bronze Age. We may be quite sure, however, that Homer's versions of these myths are not the versions the Mycenaeans knew, because myth changes with every telling and is constantly being improved, made more "modern" and "meaningful." Certain archaic features like chariot drill or guala or stone-walled cities, or foreign voyagers like Bellerophon in Lycia, may have been "remembered" in the professional sense by poets for four hundred years - rarely going back earlier than 1250, however.

p. 312 Homer and Hesiod suffered relatively little change after their death because their poems were written down. Before that, the material they used had been subjected to four or five hundred years of creative change. Since 1100 B.C. at the very latest no one had seen a live Mycenaean or knew what he ate or wore, how he lived or sang. Occasionally the accidental discovery of a tomb gave impetus to myths about the past; sometimes traditions were kept alive in families. But whatever the Greeks knew about their own Bronze Age past was surely very different from past reality.