

What problems have you identified in making connections between the world described in the Homeric poems and the archaeological evidence you have studied? How far do you think it is possible to resolve these problems?

In this essay I shall demonstrate that it is not currently possible to resolve the problems I have identified in making connections, between the world of the Homeric poems and the archaeological evidence I have studied. This essay will deal with two specific areas, the first is that of the problems associated with the citadel of Troy while the second, will deal with the problems posed by, Homers descriptions of the armour and the weapons used by the hero's of the Iliad.

In book six of the Iliad Homer mentions a series of features in relation to the citadel of Troy. These range from the description of the hero's houses, such as Hektor's 'well established dwelling' in 370 and Paris' 'high house' in 503, to the descriptions of the defences of the city as found in lines 327 where he mentions 'the steep wall', and in line 386 the 'great bastions of Ilion'. When looking at the archaeological evidence that remains at the site of Troy (known today as Hissarlik), we find that there are several related problems which make its interpretation and therefore its connection to the world described by Homer in the Iliad difficult. The first problem relates to the history of the site in terms of its habitation. First settled in 3000BCE, evidence from archaeology suggests that there are a total of 50 settlement layers that makeup the mound on which the citadel was built, (These have subsequently been subdivided into nine sections i.e. Troy I to Troy IX for ease of reference). This raises problems in that each successive settlement built upon the remains of the previous, re-using their materials. And in the case of the Romans (who built the settlement known as Troy IX), completely removing the top of the mound, and thus the centre of the 13th century BCE settlement known as Troy VI. This is a major problem as Troy VI is generally accepted as the settlement which corresponds to the period in which the Trojan war of the Iliad is set. Another problem

relating to the citadel is the damage that was caused to the site by Heinrich Schliemann, Troy's first excavator. Working on the assumption that Homers Troy lay at the bottom of the mound, Schliemann dug a series of trenches through the site, an action which resulted in the loss of a great deal of evidence.

Despite these initial problems, some material evidence relating to Troy VI does survive on the site. Such as parts of its defensive walls (the remains of which are fifteen feet high and six feet thick), and an eastern bastion, there are also just behind the walls the foundations of a number of large buildings. The problems we face in relating these remains to the words of Homer is that, none of his references, including those referring to the steep walls and the bastion, despite the fact that they remain in situ can be related to, or prove a connection between Homers Troy and the site at Hissarlik. The reason for this is that homers references are in the form of descriptive epithets and while the epithets he uses such as 'well-laid streets' (391) and 'fragrant store' (287) are not necessarily out of place in describing features that could have existed on such a site, they are far too general. A weakness that is further demonstrated by the fact that they could equally be applied to any fortified site of the period, such as Tiryns and Mycenae (VC1:53:27). The existence of these features, do not in themselves prove the truth of the story as told by Homer. As professor Easton points out (VC 2:19:16-50), the walls and the bastion of Troy VI would have been visible from the time they were built right through to the 8th century, when the Iliad reached its 'final form'. It is therefore possible that they served as the focal point around which the legendary tales of Homer's heroic age were built.

The age that Homer tells of in the Iliad is one in which the hero's fight with armour and weapons, items that are highly prized and sought after (6.617-18). There are four

scenes within the Iliad in which Homer describes in full detail the armour and weapons of the heroes, they are Alexandros in 3.330-448, Agamemnon at 11.17-44, Patroklos in 16.131-44 and Achilles at 19.369-91. As genre scenes the descriptions follow a standard formula, with the occasional digression to add details such as, the ornamentation of Agamemnon's breast plate at 11.24-28, and to highlight the inability of Patroklos to wield the ash spear of Achilles at 16.140-44, a point which highlights the fact that there are some major differences in the type of weapons and armour that are used. These differences are seen when we compare the weapons and armour described in the four scenes mentioned above. Both Paris (3.338) and Achilles (19.387-8) are described as carrying single spears, Paris's is described as 'strong shafted' while Achilles' is 'huge heavy thick', this is in contrast to Agamemnon and Patroklos who are both described as carrying 'two strong spears' at (11.43) and (16.139) respectively. These differences raise problems because the archaeological evidence found in the grave circles at Mycenae, suggests a date for the use of the single spear as between the sixteenth to early fourteenth century BCE, some two to three hundred years prior to the thirteenth century BCE date generally accepted as the date of Homer's Trojan War, while the two shorter spears were in use from the twelfth right down to the eighth century BCE (VC1:22:07, Sherratt fig. 5 p162).

In her essay on *Archaeology and the Homeric question*, Sherratt suggests that these anomalies regarding armour and weapons are the result of the oral nature of the poems. Arranging the structural components of the poem (i.e. speeches, formulaic scenes, similes, etc.) into those that are more or less liable to change over the passage of time, as each society seeks to make the poems more accessible and relevant to their day, Sherratt lists under more susceptible to change, incidental detail or description, this would include the description of armour and weapons (Sherratt Fig.3). This can be

demonstrated when we look at the shields the men are carrying in the arming scenes mentioned above. There we find that Paris Patroklos and Achilleus are all described as carrying a 'great shield' that is 'huge and heavy' while Agamemnon's is described as 'man-enclosing'. All four shields allude to a style of shield, which, like the single spear, ceased to be used by the time of Homer's Trojan War (VC1:45:26). A further example that demonstrates Sherratt's point is found in book seven and relates to the shield of Aias. Homer refers to Aias' shield on three separate occasions, the first in 7.219 and again in (11.485 and 17.128) on each occasion the shield is described as being carried 'like a Wall', this implies it is the body length shield in the shape of the figure eight, used during the sixteenth century (VC1:26:38). Yet in line 267 of book seven Homer describes the shield as having a 'knob at the centre', this would suggest that, the shield is, the much later and much smaller round shield which dates between the twelfth to the eighth century BCE (Wilcox p79, Sherratt 159). What this demonstrates is that, there are within the poem, running side by side, (as the archaeological evidence suggests) the description of weapons from two different chronological time periods, that of the sixteenth to early fourteenth century BCE and the twelfth to early eighth century BCE. What Homer appears to be doing is grafting the features of weapons that were in common use during the time he was reciting the poems (i.e. 8th century BCE), onto those that were used in a previous age. This suggests that Homer was not fully conversant with or had not seen some of the weapons he was describing.

So in conclusion, we have in this essay looked at the problems relating to both the Citadel of Troy and the armour and the weapons worn by the hero's of the Iliad. Both highlight the difficulties of making direct connections to the world of Homer. The archaeological excavations on the site of Hissarlik have not as yet yielded any evidence that can prove the stories as told in the Iliad. In order for this problem to be resolved

there would need to be a discovery on the site, of some form of textual evidence that explicitly refers to the events as described by Homer in his poems (AC4, band 6). The issues relating to the Armour and weapons of the Iliad are also difficult to resolve in relation to the world created by Homer, as the archaeological evidence clearly indicates that, the stories have changed, being manipulated as they passed through centuries of oral recitation. It is therefore my conclusion that it is not currently possible to resolve the issues that have been dealt with within this essay.

Bibliography

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