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Evidences of Error in the Iliad

p. 38 Without entering into technical archaeological analysis, we may point to the battle terrain. The Iliad is filled with details, for that is the stuff of heroic narrative. Basically they are so consistent that a serviceable map of the area can be drawn from the poet's specifications. That map and the region of Hissarlik fail to coincide, and the discrepancies are so crucial that it has been proved impossible to recreate essential scenes of the Iliad on the actual site.

More interesting than the disappearance of the city is the total disappearance of the Trojans themselves. To begin with, as a nationality in the Iliad they are quite without distinguishing characteristics. They are as Greek and as heroic as their opponents in every respect. . . . Even after Homer had located Hector in Troy for all time, the Thebans held on to their hero, and the Delphic oracle provided the necessary sanction.

p.38 The Carians are well known historically; . . .  
p. 39 Other Trojan allies are also historically identifiable, and that serves to underscore the curious fact that the Trojans themselves, like Achilles' Myrmidons, have vanished so completely. Even if we were to accept the ancient explanation for the disappearance of the city, that it was so thoroughly demolished by the victors that "there is no certain trace of walls"<sup>18</sup> - which would involve us in new difficulties with Schliemann and his successors, who found traces of walls - it is hard to discover a parallel for the mysterious failure of the people themselves to leave any traces.

Fact in Homer

p. 39 On the Greek side there is a high correlation between the important place names given in the Iliad and the centers of the so-called Mycenaean civilization rediscovered by modern archaeologists, although the poverty of the finds in Odysseys' Ithaca is a notable exception. This civilization flourished in Greece in the period 1400-1200 B.C., and here the name of Schliemann as the first discoverer must remain unchallenged.

Error in Homer

p. 39 But again Homer and archaeology part company quickly. On the whole, he knew where the Mycenaean civilization flourished, and his heroes lived in great Bronze Age palaces unknown in Homer's own day. And that is virtually all he knew about Mycenaean times, for the catalogue of his errors is very long. His arms bear a resemblance to the armor of his time, quite unlike the Mycenaean, although he persistently casts them in antiquated bronze, not iron. His gods had temples, and the Mycenaeans built none, whereas the latter constructed great vaulted tombs in which to bury their chieftans, and the poet cremates his. A neat little touch is provided by the battle chariots. Homer had heard of them, but he did not really visualize what one did with chariots in a war. So his heroes normally drove from their tents a mile or less away, carefully dismounted, and then proceeded to battle on foot.

p. 40 The key to the Homeric confusion lies in the bardic technique. The raw materials of the poem were the mass of inherited formulas, and as they passed through generations of bards they underwent change after change, partly by deliberate act of the poets, whether for artistic reasons or from more prosaic political considerations, and partly by carelessness and indifference to historical accuracy, compounded by the errors that are inevitable in oral transmission. That there was a Mycenaean kernel in the Iliad and Odyssey cannot be doubted, but it was small and what little there was of it was distorted beyond sense of recognition. Often the material was self-contradictory, yet that was no bar to its use. Poetic convention demanded traditional formulas, and neither the bard nor his audience checked the details.