

"Homer and Mycenae: Property and Tenure" by M. I. Finley  
in Kirk's Lang and Background of Homer

p. 204 With respect to the contents of the Iliad and Odyssey, there is a profound qualitative difference between narrative and institutions (or background). For the former, I would argue, they are essentially worthless as sources. With the one exception of the political geography of the Mycenaean world, the kernel of historical fact which may lie buried in the tales cannot usually be detected by any method of analysis, internal or comparative. For this purpose, direct external evidence is indispensable. The institutions, on the otherhand, are described (more often, intimated) with considerable accuracy. To take one example: the innumerable genealogies can be discarded in their entirety as annals of specific princely families in specific places; but the institutions of kinship, marriage, and dynastic alliance underlying the genealogies appear in the poems essentially as they existed at some time in the Greek world (the tenth and ninth centuries B.C., I have suggested).<sup>1</sup>

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Footnote 1 . . . . The comparative study of heroic poetry shows, I think decisively, that the society portrayed tends to be relatively (though not entirely) "modern", for all the pretence of great antiquity and for all the archaism of the armour and the political geography.

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