

p. 184 Kirk in fact does want the "monumental composition" of the Iliad to be a completely oral process, in accordance with Lord's second principle. But he does not want the work as a whole put into writing for at least 100 years after composition. His reasons for this assertion are negative, and he would evidently argue that they must necessarily be so. They are the difficulty of imagining the process of making a very large book at the probable time of composition, and the alleged interpolations such as the Doloneia and the end of the Odyssey, which presumably could have been added more easily to a written text than to one handed down by repeated singing. To these he would now add (in conversation with me) the argument that the written recording of a poem as long as the Iliad or the Odyssey in the late eight century would have been an event of too great magnitude not to have left a memory of its own.

None of these reasons appears to be unambiguous or decisive. There is no evidence whatever that the act of writing on so large a scale would not have been possible at that date. It would, of course, have been a remarkable event. But the introduction of the alphabet was itself a remarkable event. And so was the composition of the Iliad. The interpolations are themselves questionable. . . . As for the lack of any record of the epoch-making (epic-making?) act of putting such long poems into writing - is this any stranger than our virtually complete lack of any record of the person Homer himself, on any theory?

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p. 185 Denys Page, whose History and the Homeric Iliad has exerted a strong influence on Homeric scholars, wanted an extraordinarily early date for Homer - around the end of the ninth century. Since this would place the date of composition well before the introduction of writing, it would make Kirk's notion of reasonably accurate oral reproduction a necessity. But Kirk himself, although he raises the possibility that Page's date may be right, is much more inclined to the now commonly accepted late eight-century date; and Page's own reasons appear curiously casual in the texture of his brilliantly argued book.