CHAPTER I

Introduction

LEGEND, LANGUAGE, ARCHAEOLOGY

The excavations of Troy and Mycenae initiated by Heinrich Schliemann in the 1870s opened the great era of archaeological reconstruction of Aegean prehistory. In 1900, the highly developed Minoan civilisation of Crete began to be uncovered by Sir Arthur Evans and others. Especially significant was the discovery of the Aegean scripts - Linear A, Linear B and Cretan Hieroglyphic - which accompanied Evans' excavation. In the years following these discoveries the Minoan was firmly believed to have been the dominant civilisation of the Bronze Age Aegean. It was not until 1939, when the Pylos Linear B archives were discovered by Carl Blegen and the Cincinnati expedition, that the majority of archaeologists realised what had been clear to only a few, namely, that we should speak of two Aegean civilisations rather than one: the Minoan civilisation of Crete and the Mycenaean civilisation of mainland Greece. Although Mycenaean Greece developed later and under considerable Minoan influence, it eventually prevailed, and in the Late Bronze Age Crete turned into a Mycenaean province. The former Minoan colonies became Mycenaean, and after ca. 1450 BC Mycenaean influence replaced Minoan not only in the Aegean but also in western Anatolia. In 1953, when the decipherment of Linear B by Michael Ventris was made public, it was demonstrated beyond doubt that the language of the Mycenaean civilisation was Greek. As a result, an entirely new period, that of Mycenaean Greece, was added to Greek history.

The impression made by the discovery of Troy was so strong that for a long time most scholars took it for granted that for all practical purposes the Homeric poems, which had directly stimulated Schliemann's excavations, should be approached as an authentic document originating in Bronze Age Greece. Many a reconstruction of the religion, society, economics and institutions of Mycenaean Greece published in the first

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half of the twentieth century proceeded from this assumption. This
period in Homeric scholarship produced such epoch-making studies as
The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology and *Homer and Mycenae* by
M. P. Nilsson (1932 and 1933), *Homer and the Monuments* by H. L.
Lorimer (1950), *From Mycenae to Homer* by T. B. L. Webster (1958),
and was crowned with two great syntheses, *History and the Homeric Iliad*
by Denys Page (1959) and *A Companion to Homer* by A. J. B. Wace and
F. H. Stubbings (1962). Ironically, the years in which the two latter
appeared were precisely the time when the pendulum of scholarly opinion
as regards the historical value of the Homeric poems swung back.

In the 1950s, a radical shift began to take place in the evaluation of
Homer's historic background. More than one factor was responsible for
this development. The picture of Mycenaean society that emerged after
the decipherment of Linear B led to an increasing understanding that the
Homeric poems are by no means a direct reflection of that society; the
study of the Homeric formulae showed that, contrary to what the pion-
eers of oral formulaic theory had believed, the traditional language is
characterised by a high degree of flexibility and adaptation, so that it is
absolutely out of the question that everything we find in Homer could
have arrived untouched from the Bronze Age; finally, it was shown that
the picture of society arising from the Homeric poems properly belongs to
a later period. This last conclusion was almost entirely due to the work of
M. I. Finley, whose articles and especially the book *The World of Odysseus*
(1954) opened a new era in the historical study of Homer. As a result, a
new consensus has arisen, which locates the historic background to the
Homeric poems in the first rather than in the second millennium BC.

Finley himself placed the formative stage of the Homeric epics in the
so-called 'Dark Age' (ca. 1050–ca. 800 BC). Yet, the argument that made it
difficult to see in Homer a direct reflection of Mycenaean Greece also
holds good as regards the hypothesis that a poet who presumably lived in
the eighth or even seventh century BC was describing a society which
preceded him by two hundred years. As Ian Morris put it in a seminal
article, 'Trying to find tenth- and ninth-century societies in the *Iliad* and
Odyssey is just as misguided as looking for the Mycenaeans.'[1] That is to
say, if the Homeric epics do allow for the reconstruction of a consistent
social and historical picture, this picture would rather belong to the time
of the poet himself. That is why contemporary scholarly opinion tends
to see the eighth century BC as providing the appropriate historic

[1] I. Morris 1986: 127. Cf. Raaflaub 1991: 212; Bennet 1997.

background for the Homeric poems. Today, 130 years after Schliemann's discovery of Troy, the issue of 'Homer and Mycenae' is no longer considered substantial by the majority of scholars.[2]

At the same time, it seems that reaction to the older scholars' fundamentalist approach to the Greek heroic tradition has gone too far. It should not be forgotten that we owe our very knowledge of the existence of Mycenaean Greece to the stimulus that the poems of Homer furnished to Schliemann and others more than a hundred years ago. As Nilsson demonstrated in the 1930s, the cities identified by Homer as capitals of the kingdoms of heroic Greece were significant Mycenaean sites. In an article published in 1974 Antony Snodgrass convincingly argued that the contradictions in Homer's depiction of social institutions cannot be resolved and should be interpreted to the effect that, rather than reflecting a concrete historic society, the Homeric poems offer an amalgam created as a result of centuries-long circulation in oral tradition. If we also take into account that the language of Homer is a *Kunstsprache* consisting of different historic layers of the Greek language, including the earliest ones; that his formulae for weapons exhibit a combination of Bronze Age military technologies with those of the Archaic period; and that the same mixture of different historic periods is characteristic of his view of death and the afterlife, it would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that at least some parts of what we find in Homer must go back to earlier periods, including the Bronze Age.[3]

Finally, the comparative evidence makes it abundantly manifest that, whenever a heroic tradition can be correlated with written evidence, it can often be shown to have preserved a memory of momentous historic events, such as wars, migrations or foreign invasions. It would therefore be anachronistic to approach epic tradition with modern criteria of historicity and on the basis of this to deny it all historical basis whatsoever. To quote *The Chronology of Oral Tradition* by David P. Henige, the subtitle of which, *Quest for a Chimera*, speaks for itself: 'No one who has worked extensively with oral materials will deny their value as historical

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2 This change of perspective is made immediately obvious from a comparison between the 1962 *Companion to Homer* by Wace and Stubbings on the one hand and *Zweihundert Jahre Homer-Forschung* by Joachim Latacz (1991) and *A New Companion to Homer* by Ian Morris and Barry Powell (1997) on the other. While all the historical chapters in the old *Companion* discuss various aspects of the Mycenaean background of Homer, only one contribution in each of the recent volumes deals with the Bronze Age.

3 Snodgrass 1974; cf. Finkelberg 1998b: 25–8. On language see e.g. Ruijgh 1967; on weapons Gray 1947; on death and afterlife Sourvinou-Inwood 1995: 12–13, 73–6, 89–92.

sources.'[4] A more detailed discussion as regards the historical value of traditional stories will be postponed until the next section. At this point, it suffices to say that to propose a more nuanced approach to the issue of the historicity of Greek tradition is one of the purposes of this book.

Similarly, the accumulation of data regarding the Bronze Age Aegean, and in particular its relationships with the contemporary civilisations of the Near East, has created a need for fresh approaches. While dramatic new insights have been achieved in the study of this topic in both archaeology and linguistics, relatively little has been done in terms of their integration into a larger picture. Moreover, and perhaps more important, very little attention has been paid to the fact that various processes in Western Asia on the one hand and the Eastern Mediterranean on the other did not develop independently of one another but are linked in a complex network of relationships. This concerns first and foremost the new assessment of the dispersion of Bronze Age Anatolian languages and its relevance to the issue of the so-called 'pre-Hellenic', or 'Aegean', substratum, one of the focal points of this book.

The study of the Anatolian languages is today about one hundred years old. Spectacular results have been achieved during this period in the discovery, decipherment and interpretation of documents written in Hittite, Palaic, Luwian, Lycian, Lydian and other Anatolian languages, and a new scholarly discipline, that of Anatolian studies, has emerged. At the same time, it would be no exaggeration to say that this discipline has not exerted any substantial influence on our construction of the prehistory of Greece. The contacts between Anatolian studies and Classics are only too rare and mostly affect isolated cases, such as the much-discussed '*Ahhiyawa* problem'. Many current theories of Greek prehistory still proceed from assumptions that can be traced to the end of the nineteenth century. However, the data thus far accumulated in the field of Anatolian studies are significant enough not only to throw a new light on these assumptions but perhaps even to challenge them.

As early as 1896, Paul Kretschmer drew scholarly attention to the fact that since the suffixes -*nth*- and -*ss*-, often attested in place-names in Greece, Crete and Asia Minor, cannot be identified as Greek, they should be taken as pointing to the existence of a pre-Hellenic linguistic substratum. In 1928, J. Haley and C. W. Blegen, in their seminal article 'The coming of the Greeks', showed that the distribution on the map of Greece of the geographical names identified by Kretschmer and others as

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4 Henige 1974: 191. Cf. Hainsworth 1984: 112–13, Kirk 1990: 43–4; Finkelberg 1998c: 87–8.

belonging to the pre-Hellenic substratum closely corresponds to the map of distribution of Early Bronze Age archaeological sites.[5] This allowed the authors to associate the pre-Hellenic substratum with the people who inhabited Greece till the end of the Early Bronze Age and to move the date of the Greek arrival in Greece, formerly believed to have taken place ca. 1600 BC, to the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2050–2000 BC).[6]

But what about the linguistic identity of the Aegean substratum? It is well known that the suffixes *-nth-* and *-ss-* on the basis of which it was identified are closely paralleled by the suffixes *-nd-* and *-ss-* of the languages of Asia Minor attested in the Classical period, such as Lycian, Lydian and Carian. The discovery and decipherment of Hittite and other Bronze Age Anatolian languages has shown that they are closely related to the languages of Asia Minor and that the suffixes *-nth-* and *–ss* should be identified as typically Anatolian or, to be more precise, Luwian. Thus, the place-name *Parnassos* has consistently been analysed as a possessive adjective typical of the Luwian language, formed from a root which is likewise Luwian, for the word *parna* means 'house' in both Luwian and Lycian.[7] This evidently gives us a new perspective on the much-discussed issue of Near Eastern influences on Greek civilisation, which has recently received a substantial boost in M. L. West's *The East Face of Helicon*.[8] To the best of my knowledge, this perspective has not yet been fully explored.

Above all, however, the new assessment of the linguistic provenance of the Aegean substratum is directly relevant to the question of the identity of the population groups that inhabited Greece before 'the coming of the Greeks'. This question bears directly upon that of the terms in which the identity of the 'Hellenes' themselves is to be approached. Since the issues of ethnicity and ethnic identity in ancient Greece have recently become the focus of a lively scholarly discussion, I will address them separately in a later section.

5 Kretschmer 1896; Haley and Blegen 1928: 141–54. Cf. Caskey 1973: 139–40.
6 According to the minority opinion, represented by James Muhly, Robert Drews and others, the arrival of the Greeks should be synchronised with the emergence of the shaft graves of Mycenae at the end of the Middle Helladic period (ca. 1600 BC). Alternatively, John Coleman proposes abandoning the current dating of the 'coming of the Greeks', arguing that it was one of the waves of the Kurgan peoples that brought the Greeks to Greece ca. 3200 BC. See further Drews 1988: 16–24; Carruba 1995; Coleman 2000.
7 See Laroche 1957 and 1961; Heubeck 1961: 50–2; Palmer 1965: 30, 343, 348. Cf. Drews 1997: 153–7; Finkelberg 1997a: 7; Renfrew 1998: 253–4. Cf. also Parnes and Parnon, mountains in Attica and Laconia (I am grateful to Oliver Dickinson for drawing my attention to these names).
8 West 1997. See also Burkert 1992; S. Morris 1992.

Together with the issues of the ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity of the pre-Hellenic population of Greece, I will discuss the terms on which cultural interaction between Greeks and pre-Greeks was made possible, the duration of this interaction and its eventual impact on the civilisation of historic Greece. The book will address these questions by systematically confronting the Greek tradition of the Heroic Age with the evidence of linguistics and archaeology.

The analysis of the standard corpus of Greek genealogy carried out in Chapter 2 demonstrates that the heroic genealogies acted as an inventory not only of the 'descendants of Hellen' but also of other descent groups. At the same time, even those who did not count as descendants of Hellen were nevertheless considered 'Hellenes' in historic Greece. This hetero-geneity of Greek genealogy strongly suggests that, rather than founding their group identity on belief in a common descent, the body of 'Hellenes' as it is known to us from the historic period perceived itself as an ethnically heterogeneous group.

The even spread of the suffixes -*ss*- and -*nth*- over western Asia, Greece and Crete strongly suggests that the so-called pre-Hellenic populations of Greece were of Anatolian stock. If true, this would lead us not only to Anatolia but also farther east, for the simple reason that the Anatolians of Asia, Indo-Europeans though they were, cannot be taken separately from the great civilisations of the Near East. As the archaeological discoveries of recent years show, the Bronze Age Aegean was in close contact with these civilisations. The degree to which this new assessment of the linguistic and archaeological evidence at our disposal may affect the terms of the current discussion of the cultural identity of Aegean civilisation will be examined in Chapter 3.

The archaeological record shows little or no break in continuity in the material culture of Greece for the second millennium BC. To quote the standard account of the period as given by John Caskey, 'From the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age onward there was no real break in the continuity of cultural development, in spite of the several spectacu-lar advances and retreats that occurred, and therefore the people of Middle Helladic times must be looked upon as the first true Greeks in the land.'[9] At the same time, the 'coming of the Greeks' postulated by older scholars can hardly be envisaged as a single historic event. To quote Caskey again,

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9 Caskey 1973: 139.

The process of change, which is reflected by archaeological evidence from many parts of the region, cannot have been simple. Rather, as was generally the case when migrations took place, the newcomers arrived in groups of various sizes, probably over an appreciable period of time. The people whom they found in possession also varied in the size and prosperity of their communities, some ready to resist while others deemed it necessary or prudent to make terms with the foreigners.[10]

Greek genealogical tradition suggests a similar picture. What it adds to the evidence of archaeology, however, is the element of fusion it implies between the Greeks and the indigenous population. The issue is obviously of crucial importance, and in Chapters 4 and 5 I will try to pursue it further by analysing the patterns of marriage between heterogeneous descent groups as they emerge in the literary and historical sources.

Large-scale migrations at the end of the Bronze Age transformed the dialect map of Greece into an irrational mosaic, where dialects with little linguistic overlap (e.g. Boeotian and Attic) inhabit contiguous territories, but closely related dialects such as Arcadian and Cyprian are geographically remote from each other. In view of this, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the historic Greek dialects are no more than fragments of a whole which had ceased to exist before the political map of Greece as we know it was shaped. As I will argue in Chapter 6, the manner in which the principal dialect features are distributed among the historic dialects leads to the conclusion that before the collapse of Mycenaean Greece a dialect continuum characteristic of long-settled areas had spread without disruption over most of the territory of Greece. The evidence of the dialects thus agrees with archaeological evidence, in that both show that there was no break in continuity during the second millennium BC.

All this changes at the end of the second millennium. The destruction levels and depopulation attested at many Mycenaean sites testify to a sharp break in cultural continuity. There can be no doubt that we are facing the end of an era, and the same is true of other sites all over the Eastern Mediterranean. As I will argue in Chapter 7, the evidence supplied by the Greek dialects not only substantiates the picture drawn by archaeologists but, in that it unequivocally demonstrates the intrusive character of Doric and other West Greek dialects, also points towards the factors that effected the collapse of Mycenaean Greece. There can be little doubt that Greek tradition regarding the dramatic end of the Heroic Age and the migration of the last survivors of the Race of Heroes refers to

10 Caskey 1973: 117.

the same events. Furthermore, as I will argue in this chapter, the collapse of Mycenaean Greece ought to be brought into correspondence with recent archaeological discoveries in the Levant, which throw new light on the material culture of the Philistines.

Analysis of the epic tradition about the Trojan War allows us to suggest that certain events concerning the end of Mycenaean Greece did not make their way into the mainstream Greek tradition. This tradition, and above all the poems of Homer, either deliberately suppressed these events or moulded them anew in accordance with the contemporary agenda (Chapter 8). The latter consisted in answering the need for the consolidation of heterogeneous population groups that found themselves on the territory of Greece at the beginning of the first millennium BC. By creating a foundational myth that promulgated the idea of a common past, the new Greek civilisation established continuity between the Greece of the Heroic Age and historic Greece and thereby acquired the sense of common identity that it initially lacked.

The culmination of any historical enquiry is the point where the results of several disciplines coincide. 'The coming of the Greeks' by Haley and Blegen, which gave the hypothesis of the pre-Hellenic substratum a solid archaeological background, is the most conspicuous example of successful collaboration between linguistics and archaeology. That such major breakthroughs occur only too rarely should not deter us from trying to achieve meaningful correlations between different types of evidence, each with its own bias of survival and specific problems of interpretation. In recent years, such meaningful correlations between archaeology and linguistics have been established by Colin Renfrew, whereas Elizabeth Barber has shown that the dispersal of weaving technologies often supplies no less reliable evidence for population movements than the dispersal of languages.[11] Finally, although it is only recently that the research methods of genetics have begun to be applied to the study of population movements of the remote past, it has already become evident that, if consistently pursued, the application of genetics to the reconstruction of prehistory may well lead to the establishment of important correlations between genetics and historical linguistics.[12] It would be a pity if intellectual snobbery prevented the rich material supplied by myth and legend from

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[11] Renfrew 1987; Barber 1991, 1998, 1999, 2001. Cf., however, Renfrew 1998: 240: 'Despite these advances, I feel that archaeologists and historical linguists have not worked together with any very great effect to address some of the outstanding linguistic and archaeological problems.'

[12] See esp. the linguistic sections in Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1996: 22–4, 164–7, 220–2, 263–6, 317–20, 349–51, 380–2. Cf. Renfrew 2001: 46–50.

becoming part of this joint effort. We have to consider every scrap of information that can throw light on human prehistory, for the simple reason that it is only such a multi-disciplinary approach that can give us a wider perspective of the past and guarantee real progress in the field.

MYTHS BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

The use of linguistic evidence for reconstructing the past hardly requires justification. The very fact of linguistic attribution of a given language or group of languages is a matter of great historical import. Thus, the conclusion that Greece was once occupied by non-Greek-speaking population groups only became possible as a result of analysis of the suffixes -*nth*- and -*ss*-. The same is true of population movements. The character of relationships between individual languages or dialects, in that it allows for coherent interpretation of these relationships in terms of geography, affords linguistics a much better vantage point for assessing the dispersal of populations than the one provided by archaeology. Thus, as we shall see in Chapter 7, while archaeology does not supply a clear picture as to the nature of the factors responsible for the collapse of Mycenaean Greece, analysis of the Greek dialects does offer such a picture.

The importance of the evidence provided by the ancient texts themselves is also immediately obvious. Unfortunately, as far as Aegean prehistory is concerned, only scarce textual evidence is available. Immensely important as the Linear B texts are, the historical information that they accumulate is not even remotely close to that contained in the documentary materials of the Near East. Some of these documents, such as the Hittite historical records relating to royal succession in the Old Hittite Kingdom, are addressed in the present book, but only as circumstantial evidence, as it were.

What the student of Greek prehistory has instead are literary sources originating in oral tradition. While it goes without saying that this tradition should not be treated on an equal footing with documentary sources nor used without being correlated with archaeological and linguistic evidence, it can nevertheless be employed with profit for the reconstruction of history. This is recognised even by those students of contemporary oral traditions who are best known for their critical attitude to the value of these historical traditions. Thus, according to Jan Vansina, 'Without oral traditions we would know very little about the past of large parts of the world, and we would not know them from the inside . . . Where there is no writing or almost none, oral traditions must bear the

brunt of historical reconstruction.' In a similar vein, David Henige wrote: 'Regardless of this weakness, however, the body of oral tradition, real and potential, represents, together with archaeology and linguistics, nearly all that the historian of sub-Saharan Africa has to work with in his efforts to understand the more remote past.'[13] The question, however, is that of the terms on which the issue of the historicity of oral tradition should be approached.

There are two ways in which historical myth can be used for understanding the past. First, it can be taken as telling us something about the past that it purports to describe; second, its historicity can be placed solely within the present, that is, within the period in which it was actually fixed. While older scholars favoured the first approach, the second is more widespread in our days. Within the last decade especially, the focus of attention has decisively shifted from the Mycenaean 'past' to the Archaic and Classical 'present' of Greek myth. This in itself is a welcome development, which compensates for earlier scholars' neglect of the myth's role as a vehicle for interpreting and legitimating historical circumstances in the present. What makes it difficult for me to adopt either unreservedly, however, is the extreme reductivism characteristic of both approaches. While one tends to see everything in historical myth as direct evidence of the past that the myth ostensibly describes, the other tends to deny to the myth any past dimension whatsoever. Yet the material at our disposal is much too complex to admit of such either/or assumptions.

Nobody today would deny that at any given moment historical myth functions as a cultural artefact representative of the period in which it circulates rather than the one which it purports to describe.[14] This would be even more true of traditional societies, in which the transmission of information is either entirely or predominantly oral. Thus, according to Jack Goody, the characteristic feature of such societies is the so-called homeostatic transformation, that is, a spontaneous process of adjusting the tradition to the society's contemporary circumstances.[15] However, this ought not to be taken to mean that, as is sometimes implied, the transformation of memory was total or that myths were invented anew each time they were told or enacted. Vansina's criticism of those anthropologists who, like T. O. Beidelman, deny all evidential value to traditions about the past, is directly relevant here:

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13 Vansina 1985: 198–9; Henige 1974: 2–3.
14 On myth as cultural artefact see esp. J. Hall 1997: 40–2; Malkin 1998: 5–7; McInerney 1999: 29–30.
15 See e.g. Goody (2000), 42–6; Cf. Vansina (1985), 120–3. See also below, Chapter 8.