

Trojan war, homer
and the other
historical
embracements of
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For centuries, Homer's epic Iliad was taken as literal interpretation of the Trojan War. Only rather recently has the reliability and accuracy of the Iliad in terms of depicting the war come into question. Modern historians and scholars have come to the same conclusion that the Iliad is not to be perceived as entirely historically accurate. In order to assess the amount of historical knowledge that is present, and the reliability of the epic as a literary source, the Homeric Question comes into play, along with the perspectives historians and scholars hold of the poem and the archaeological evidence of the Trojan War in correlation to the Iliad.

The Homeric Question calls into question the identity of Homer and the authorship of the Iliad (and the Odyssey). The origin and authorship of the poem is vital in this discussion as it depicts the reliability of the literary work. All known information on Homer was derived from the knowledge of the ancient Greeks; hence, it is most likely biased material as Homer's work was deeply admired and was highly influential on the Greek culture. Ancient historians and scholars disagreed on the time frame of his life, yet everyone believed that he was blind, a statement based solely on a character in the Odyssey who was written as a blind bard. It was also generally assumed that Homer composed his epic poems with the aid of writing; however, in the eighteenth century the possibility of Homeric illiteracy was proposed. Scholar Robert Wood suggested that Homer had been as illiterate as his own characters from the Iliad. This proposal raised the question of how Homer composed the long poems he was credited with, if he was illiterate. It was later answered by Friedrich August Wolf's thesis that the Iliad originally was an oral composition, and that, preserved by memory, it was eventually

compiled into a form similar to the current Iliad. The Iliad being regarded as an oral history and being passed down by word of mouth are factors that immediately change its validity, as oral histories are significantly less reliable than those written down; memory can be easily manipulated, causing such history to be imperfect and subject to change. Thus, oral histories have the ability to be fluid and changeable. Similarly, Giambattista Vico claims that the Homeric poems were not the creation of one man, but rather the products of generations of nameless bards that refined the epics, a theory that dispels Homer as the true author. This theory is the most plausible, as it explains the inconsistencies of the narrative and the poetic language used in the Iliad. Therefore, if the Homeric Question raises valid doubts and the epic poem was based on numerous differing perspectives and went through a process of refinement, it affects the overall reliability and accuracy of the depiction of the Trojan War.

The Iliad remains a subject of debate to historians and scholars alike in regards to its historicity. Modern historians generally agree that the Iliad reflects a set of historical events but that the accuracy of the Iliad regarding those events varies. Nevertheless, it is not possible to separate fact from pure myth in the poem because there is not enough evidence produced about those historical events. Historian Moses Finley notes that the Iliad was not a contemporary and historical work, but rather one of reflection and nostalgia. It is believed by countless others that the epic poem was a subjective piece of literature, due to its glorification of war. In contrast, Herodotus and Thucydides gave weight to Homer's words in the Iliad and used the Homeric epics as a source of information about ancient Greece and

its past, as the poem reflected upon the ideals and morals of Greek society. Both historians believed that the Iliad did illustrate the events of the Trojan War, yet even so, Herodotus disagreed with Homer's account of the abduction of Helen and accused him of favouring that version in order to suit his narrative and to enhance the drama. This disparity signifies the variety of possible versions of the Trojan War, in the absence of knowledge of the accurate account. Consequently, this reading impacts the validity of Homer's Iliad, as there is no supporting evidence that his depiction of the events is entirely accurate. The viewpoints of modern and ancient historians differ as they are influenced by their historical periods, along with their own values and perspectives that lead to opposing opinions in the ongoing debate about the historicity of the Iliad. As more is discovered of the Bronze Age, Finley concludes that the Iliad contains historical knowledge of the Greek Dark Age, or of Mycenaean Greece. Historians similarly analyze the bardic traditions of ancient Greece in order to assess the historicity of the epic poem. Being that the Iliad was an oral composition, bards spoke and sang the story, naturally causing it to be subject to slight changes and improvisations during the course of reciting and delivering. This reflects on the aforementioned unreliability of oral histories. Bards rely on improvisation each time they deliver the narrative, without regards to historical accuracy or linguistic consistency; they follow the outline of the story but the oral text itself is changeable. It is impossible to identify which version of the Iliad was written down and recorded in history. Through an analysis of the different perspectives that historians and scholars hold of the Iliad, it is evident that there is a discrepancy among the perspectives. This discrepancy is due to

the absence of independent evidence about the historical events that occurred in ancient Greece in terms of the Iliad's reliability.

Passages in the Iliad seem to correspond with the archaeological evidence found of the Trojan War, which supports the debate about the epic poem holding some form of reliable historical accuracy in its contents. Heinrich Schliemann, a German archaeologist, had complete faith in the historicity of the Iliad; he took it as the literal truth and set out to discover the city of Troy using the poem as a map of the area. Schliemann's biased expectations inadvertently lead him to destroy the remains of other possible artefacts that supported Homer's Troy. However, Schliemann's excavations at Troy and Mycenae revealed newfound information about a previously unknown Bronze Age civilization; its weapons, bronze armor, and various other objects seemed to correspond to Homer's descriptions and the date of these artifacts coincided with the theorized date of the Trojan War. Modern archaeologists currently understand Troy VIIa as the Troy depicted in the Iliad. The cause of the fall of Troy VIIa appears to have been caused by warfare, perhaps from the Trojan War. The size of the city correlates with the size of Troy depicted in the Iliad, thus further validating the possible historical knowledge present in the epic tradition. The Iliad corresponding to the archaeological evidence found among Hissarlike disproves the theory that the Iliad is purely legendary; however much it romanticizes and glorifies, it does in fact hold some significant historical basis of a city similar to Homer's Troy existing at the same time as the assigned date of the Trojan War.

The question of the reliability of Homer's epic Iliad and the authenticity and dependability of the poem in relation to its depiction of the historicity of the Trojan War can be analyzed through the Homeric Question, in regards to the possibility of the Iliad being composed by an assembly of people. This question frames the perspectives of historians and scholars, the debate that arises over historical accuracy, and the consideration of how descriptions in the Iliad coincide with archaeological evidence of the Trojan War. One may conclude that this debate about the Iliad as an accurate source is ongoing, so long as much information about Homeric Age is still unknown and lost in history.